THE VISION OF ELIJAH BERL

FRANK LEWIS NASON

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By

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UNIV. OF CALIFORNIA

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PRELUDE

Eight hundred and fifty miles of winding coast line bend in and out. So far as the eye can reach over the wrinkling sheet of the Pacific, to where its giant swells beat against bare, brown cliffs and break in smothers of hissing foam, not a sail is seen, not a sign of life, save flocks of white-winged gulls and sea-mews, or herds of barking seals that swarm on rocky islets. Mountains spring from the sea and climb, mount on mount, three miles into the air, or sloping sea-washed sands stretch dry and barren and forbidding, to rise at length in verdure-clad hills and snow-capped mountains. In the mountains are savage beasts and more savage men. On the plains a few straggling herds of cattle, with uncouth vaqueros, cluster around a seeping spring of bitter water. Here and there white-washed adobe mission houses, all but hidden in a clamber of vines and trees, mark a feeble stream that trickles from the distant mountains. Olive-skinned sigñors and olive-skinned sigñoritas round out the circle of their lives and there lie down and die, unknowing and unknown; they and their fellows, undreamed of, the land of their abode a hazy myth.

As by the wave of a magic wand, all is changed.

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PRELUDE

The ocean now is dotted with sails from the uttermost parts of the earth. They choke the Golden Gate with their numbers. From their crowded decks, swarms of men, ministers of God and ministers of the devil—learned, ignorant, murderers, thieves—women, traitors to their kind, pour forth and swarm over the land. Mad with the lust of Gold, they burrow in the beds of streams, tear and claw at mountain-gulch and slope. Tented towns rise like night-grown fungi, and wither away, to spring again into existence, lawless, in a land where law is not, in a land that no man owns. Through days that are full of sweating toil and nights that cover vigils of lust and death, the ferment of hell grows in the blood of human beings who have left their God with their country.

Another wave of the wand and God reclaims his own. The courthouse and the gibbet, without mercy but full of stern justice, have taken the place of the murderer's greed that sharpened the murderer's knife.

From a thousand hills, a thousand streams have quickened the arid acres of drifting sand into fruitful life. League on league are fields of waving grain. League on league are green vineyards with their clustered fruit blushing and sweetening in the sun. League on league happy homes are all but hidden by dark-leaved trees, with fruit yellow as the golden apples of the Hesperides.

PRELUDE

And this is California! For unknown ages more desolate and terrible than Dante's wildest dream of the Inferno, in fifty years surpassing his picture of Paradise. Barred from the world on one side by ten thousand miles of stormy seas, on the other by tier on tier of mountains and miles on miles of dreary desert, were the whole United States to fade as did the cities of Nineveh and Babylon, California would still live in song and story, more golden than the mines of Ophir, more beautiful than the storied plains of the Tigris and the Euphrates.

The Vision of Elijah Berl

CHAPTER ONE

"But I know what I need. I need you."

There was a dogged tone in Elijah Berl's voice that was almost sullenly insistent.

"I have given you all that I have to give, Elijah. You don't need me. What you need is money, and that's what I haven't got."

"And I say again that I have thought of this for five years. Ever since I left New England. I have not been alone, I have been guided. Step by step I have gone over my ground up to this point. I have studied men as carefully as I have my work. You are the man I have selected, and you are the man I want."

Ralph Winston looked thoughtfully into the glowing eyes bent full upon him. The impulse was strong within him to do as the man before him wished—almost compelled—him to do; but because

of this subtle power which moved him so strongly, he hesitated. To what further lengths might it not impel him when the first step had been taken? Clear-eyed, clear-headed, never so cautious as when his desires called most loudly to him, he hesitated to take the first step in the path which Elijah Berl had so insistently opened before him. Therefore he spoke deliberately, almost coldly.

"Don't misunderstand me, Elijah. I have faith in you and I have more faith in your idea. For this very reason I hesitate to accept your offer. You and I are so different. I—"

Elijah interrupted impatiently.

"I have thought of all that. I have prayed over it. 'Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers,' and as the voice from heaven came to Paul, even so it came to me— 'What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common.' "

A smile flickered for a moment on the lips of the young engineer as he turned to a pretty little woman who, with her light sewing in her hands, was rocking gently on the wide verandah.

"What do you think about it, Amy?"

Amy Berl drew her needle the full length of the thread and held it poised for a moment as she made reply.

"Elijah knows what is best, Ralph." Then, with a swift glance at her husband, she again bent over her work.

"Of course he knows some things—"

"He knows every thing." Amy did not raise her eyes from her work this time.

With a sigh of impatience, Elijah threw himself into a chair near his wife. The needle dropped from the hand which she timidly rested upon his, while her eyes sought his face. Absorbed in himself, not a quiver responded to the touch of Amy's hand, not a glance answered the caress of her eyes.

It was a pretty picture in a grandly beautiful setting. A wide verandah, covered with climbing roses in full bloom, opened upon a scene almost tropical in its beauty. Down the redwood steps the eyes wandered across a luxuriant flower garden, still lower they rested upon a great square of dark, shining green; below this, in sharp contrast, and surrounding the shining green, tawny sand pricked in with tufts and clumps of dusty, green sage, rolling hills in descending cadence, till, in the far distance, a grayer, wimpling gray, the great Pacific marked the limits of the desert.

To the left, the eyes leaped the rock-strewn bed of the Rio Sangre de Cristo, climbed rock-ribbed, wooded slopes, up and up to the dizzy snow-clad peaks of the San Bernardinos that rested purple and white against the constant azure of a California sky. Within the limits of the cottage, the flower garden, and the irrigated orange grove, the sun seemed to hold its fierceness in awesome leash

only to let loose its fervid power upon the glowing sands and their tortured growths.

The characters were in harmony with their setting. The blue-eyed little woman, delicate, with tawny hair, a sweet-scented mountain gentian ready to shrink and fold upon itself at a shadow that could not harm, but could only feebly threaten; the young engineer, with close-cropped hair, a face chiselled with strong, undoubting strokes, a mouth half hidden by a mustache that gave a glimpse of lips too thick to be merciless, too thin to be sensuous. There was an air of alertness about the man, a suggested tireless energy that renewed its strength on the food of humor gathered even from the most monotonous commonplaces. Ralph Winston was not a rare type of man, but he was a saving one. With him was an air of inflexibility of purpose, softened with mercy; a rugged honesty that made no compromise with evil-doers, an honesty that, with laughing eyes, left the uncovered sinner ashamed and repentant, instead of defiant and revengeful in his defeat.

A tyro, looking at the smooth-shaven, boyish face of Elijah Berl, would fail to note the hardly defined lines that ran from mouth to eyes; lines broad, undulating through the whole gamut of enthusiasm, but lines that grew hard and merciless as they converged to eyes narrowed before opposition and lightened with fanatical zeal.

Winston's footing with the Berls was intimate, though upon short acquaintance. This was not strange in California. Twenty miles from the Berl ranch was a booming town that had attracted Winston. Here was a good opening for an engineer, with large and sure pay. Winston made light of the town and its promoters, and among these he had no intimates. On a hunting trip he had discovered the Berl ranch and had found it worthy of the more intimate acquaintance to which he was cordially invited. Little by little he had drawn from Elijah the story of his life in California. It had been an isolated life, full of hardship, but devoted to a single idea, that of reclaiming the vast extent of country which now lay barren and unfruitful.

The young engineer's eyes grew deep and thoughtful. This offer of an equal partnership meant even more to him than Elijah realized. Why not accept it? It was what he had hoped for, had sought for—a life work in which he could enlist his strength and his sense of honor. It was worth while, grandly worth while. His heart beat high at the thought of it. The building of a great storage dam in the mountains, the laying out of canals that should lead the stored waters to the sun-parched deserts; this was an engineer's work, and he was an engineer. In imagination he could see, as Elijah saw, the bare brown hillsides clothed in verdure

and teeming with prosperity. Why did he hesitate? Was it lack of money? That would come. Yet he hesitated. Why? Clearer than ever before came the thought of Elijah, and Winston knew that his question was answered. Elijah was his answer. Elijah himself was the obstacle in the way of his acceptance. There was no doubt of the worth of Elijah's idea, no doubt of his enthusiasm, no doubt of his patient, tireless energy. Of his integrity? There was the doubtful point.

If he accepted Elijah's offer, he could foresee the struggle that would follow. His own sense of right pitted against Elijah's fanatical zeal that recognized no right except its own desires. When the fully expanded idea of redeeming the desert hillsides should open before Elijah, before the eyes of men, when wealth and power should beckon, just a little at first, from the path of stern uncompromising honor, Elijah would not restrain himself. Would he be able to control him? Winston's lips set firmly. He knew that he would conquer in the end.

Elijah was pacing restlessly up and down the verandah, now and then casting an impatient look upon the young engineer who sat motionless, his eyes on the hillsides below them. At length he paused abruptly before Winston.

"Well?" he exclaimed explosively, "you haven't given me an answer yet."

Winston's words were measured.

"No; I haven't. If you insist upon an answer today, it will be no."

"You want time to think it over?" Elijah's voice was sarcastic.

"That's just it. I do want time. I know that if I accept your offer, you and I are going to come into collision. You have one way of looking at things, I have another. Not once, but many times, you and I are going to look at the same thing at the same time and in different ways. When these times come, one of us will have to give way." Winston waved aside Elijah's attempt to interrupt. "When these times come, I may be the one to give up, but if I am, it will be because your way appeals to my reason as being better than my own."

Winston's meaning was clear to Elijah. The "word" that he reverenced, the voice to which he listened and which he followed, meant not the weight of a feather to the man before him. Elijah moistened his nervous lips with his tongue. He had been guided to seek Winston—Winston he must have. Impatiently he put Winston's words aside.

"All this is not to the point."

"What is?" Winston asked curtly.

"This. Will you accept my offer?"

"An equal partnership with yourself?"

"Yes."

"I suppose you realize that if I accept, the man-

agement is no longer yours alone, but yours and mine?''

''Yes.''

''And that it is my right to put forth every effort to compel you to my way of thinking?'' Winston deliberately used the word compel, instead of persuade.

''Yes, yes!''

''Then I will think it over, Elijah, and will give you my final answer the next time you are in Ysleta.''

''Suppose I come tomorrow?'' Elijah's voice was assured.

''My answer will be ready.''

CHAPTER TWO

"I am so happy!" This had been the unbroken song of Amy Berl for the five years of her married life. Maternity had not altered a line of her girlish figure, neither had it crowned her with the rounded, satisfying glory of womanhood. The ceaseless, parching winds had not dimmed the lustre of her clear blue eyes, nor deadened the gloss of her soft flaxen hair. Even the hot, dry air, so trying to most, only heightened the beauty of her complexion, as the peach reveals the rich glow of its color by diffusion through the meshes of its downy veil. Delicate in face and figure, there was no suggestion of frailty, neither was there a suggestion of strength. There was the glow of perfect health. In the eyes that looked fearlessly and frankly into the eyes of others, there was unmistakably a capacity for infinite happiness and infinite suffering. This was all. The eyes were frank because they had nothing to conceal; nor did they dream that other eyes differed from themselves. They were fearless because they knew no sin in themselves or in others. There was not strength of mind or of intellect to compel the fruition of her desire for love.

It must come to her without her volition or not at all. As the flowers of the field unfold in beauty under sun and shower, even so she grew and blossomed and was fair to look upon. As the flowers of the field wither away in parching drouth, even so would the beauty of happiness fall from her shrinking soul. She was of a religious nature, not because of a consciousness of its necessity to the human soul, but because, to her, God was love and his works beautiful to look upon. God to her was impersonal, because in her was not strength of intellect to construct an entity from its manifestations. When Elijah Berl came to her, she received him as a god. Her love was not selective; it was responsive. Henceforth her daily prayers on her bended knees were to her husband, not to the Divine Giver of every good and perfect gift. Even when her first-born lay in her arms, the light that shone in her eyes was not the giving of maternal love, but the thrill of assurance that the helpless mite was but another bond that bound her happiness to her soul and made it more her own. She gave with the unconscious selfishness of a perfect mirror that which she received, no more, no less.

Elijah Berl had not yet realized what his wife was, because he was selfish in another way. He saw himself in his wife. For the present, this sufficed. Five years of struggle in the land of golden promise had not lessened his faith in him-

self, had not wearied his restless energy, nor dulled his faith in his God. From New England's granite hills, he believed God's hand had led him to this distant field. Since the day of his birth, the firm, unwavering, fanatical belief that the Bible was God's direct, unchangeable revelation to man, made him, as it had made his father, impregnable to the assaults of reason. The figurative, semi-scriptural language of his father and of his father's father had been as the breath of his nostrils. It had become a part of him as it was of his father. It was neither cant nor hypocrisy. "As it was written," was an unanswerable dictum. The very things that had shaken and are shaking to its foundation the faith in the Bible as an infallible guide, only rooted Elijah the more firmly in his belief. In California as in New England, he felt that in good time God's hand would point out the work which He had planned for him to do. He was marking time with restless steps, ready to swing into action when God should give the word. Only one part of his work had he forecast in his mind. A son of the soil, in the soil was his work to be. This was his unshaken belief. From San Benito, under the shadow of abrupt mountains, over to San Quentin where ragged chaparral grew as it might on the blood-red hills, and where cottonwoods and willows throve rank on the moisture of hidden streams, he had pitched his tent for the

night and had folded it in the morning. What mattered it to him that the scattered ranchers looked approvingly upon his fair-haired wife, and, moved with pity for her, cursed him as a heartless idiot; or that uncouth vaqueros shrugged their shoulders and softly named him a locoed gringo?

The few dollars which he had brought with him from the East, had long since been spent in his wanderings. The goodly sum which had come to him on the death of his father, was no longer what it had been; yet he had no thought of despair. The limit of his wanderings was narrowing in concentric circles, and at length its centre was fixed. With almost his last dollar, he had bought a wide ranch from a dreamy Mexican who had then gone his way. Already the land around his was heaving and swelling in undulating rolls that warn the mariner of a coming storm. Bearded ranchers laughed in scorn, and mild-eyed Mexicans spoke even more softly. What were a few seeping springs on the hillsides? What were the hillsides themselves beside the rolling plains at their feet, where herds of cattle fed and drank and mired themselves in green-fringed cienagas? Elijah was disturbed no more than was Noah when he closed the doors of his ark against the gibes of the unbelievers. His mission was being disclosed, point by point and line by line, to his waiting eye.

Elijah deepened his springs and hoarded the

water they gave. Between rows of dark-green leaves, shrubs that faded not in summer's drouth nor in winter's rains, he guided trickling streams, apportioning to each its proper share. Through the day he toiled with increasing energy. Towards each night, with Amy by his side, he rested by the door of his cottage and looked below, over reddening hills, across the rolling plains, beyond where the half-buried disc of the sun spread wide the golden mantle of its light upon the wrinkling waters of the Pacific. Behind the cottage, from the rock-strewn wash of the Rio Sangre de Cristo, the lowest foot-hills rose to wooded slopes, grew to timbered mountains, up and up till the forests gave way to the snow-capped peaks of the San Bernardinos. "I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills whence cometh my help." In midday's toil when Elijah paused to rest his strained back, or to wipe the perspiration from his streaming face, in the silence of the night, when the moon lay white and still upon the slumbering landscape, his eyes sought out the solemn mountains which were shaping his dreams. He listened to the roar of the torrents that came faint with distance, when the mountains wrung dry the clouds that shrouded their peaks, or when the fierce sun swept away their winter's mantle of white. He watched the surging flood that rolled breast-high in receding waves through the Sangre de Cristo, tossing boul-

ders like feathers in their boisterous strength; watched it rush through torrid plains and finally sink from sight beneath the sands. He watched the parched lips held to the Tantalean cup, saw the few drops of stolen moisture quicken into verdant life, saw, when the flood had passed by and the mountains had ceased to give forth their murmurs, the mocking sun crackle the up-sprung life to choking dust, and once more the shimmering heat-waves rise in trembling agony from the tortured sands. Then the voice that was calling him grew more distinct, the guiding hand more clearly outlined. As the blood of Christ quickened into life the soul dead in sin, so should the stream that bore His name quicken into blooming fields the dead, dry sands of the desert. His lips moved reverently with his unuttered words, a prayer for guidance, a chant of faith, as his eyes swept from crest to crest of the blood-red hills that held the river of the blood of Christ against the mountains of its birth.

In spite of his words to the contrary, Elijah was disturbed by Winston's attitude. What was the flaw in his scheme that held Winston aloof? Elijah was in an agony of doubt. Up and down the flower-scented paths, through groves of orange, yellow with golden fruit, he paced with restless steps. With all his soul he strained to catch an opening in the clouds that held the future from

his eyes. Little by little the sense of depression yielded to his efforts, little by little the vision that had kept him constant, returned to him in the full glory of perfection. He had been watching the hills as they glowed in the light of the setting sun. As the gray night, settling over all, blotted out the details of the landscape, leaving the mountains a purple blur against the faint blue of the sky, Elijah felt a strong reaction. He feared, yet longed for the coming light; feared, lest it should prove that the plan which had been revealed to him might be but the figment of a frenzied dream.

Amy was sitting beside him as usual, her hand in his. Her eyes dreamily watched the shifting shadows as the sinking sun moved them to and fro in a stately march. As the shadows deepened to darkness, her eyes closed and her head sank upon Elijah's shoulder. Elijah could no longer endure the strain of questioning doubt that the shadows were pouring over his soul.

"Amy! Amy!" he called.

"What is it, Elijah?"

"I can't see, Amy. I saw it all, and now it's gone."

"What is gone, Elijah?" The voice was heavy with sleep.

"I can't sit still any longer. Let's walk. The moon will be up soon and then I can see if I was wrong. Come."

Amy was again sleeping. He shook her gently as he rose to his feet.

"Come."

"I am so tired, Elijah." She rose and turned toward the open door. "Let's wait until tomorrow."

"I can't wait. It's now, now!"

Amy was conscious of nothing save her overpowering drowsiness.

"Come in with me, Elijah."

"No, no! I can't." Elijah was irritated; not at Amy, but at the tingle of opposition that played upon his strained nerves.

"Goodnight, Elijah." She put up her dreamy lips for his goodnight kiss; but Elijah had left her and was again striding up and down, his eyes fixed on the purple blur. Without further word, she entered the cottage and lay down to the rest for which her eyes so longed.

One by one the stars pricked through the arching sky, filling the space above the earth with a light that only intensified the darkness below. Hour after hour passed by. At length a silver halo fringed the mountain summits, a band of light softly parting the blue of the sky from the purple of the mountains. A silver disc, barred with dense black lines, moved grandly into the waiting sky, and twinkling stars veiled their faces before their coming queen. Far out on the plain a banded line

of light moved against the retreating darkness. Against the hills it swept, charging their steep slopes, creeping up their darkened gulches, glowing on their conquered crests; on and on it swept, until the retreating shadows sank from the earth before the hosts of light. As the outlines of the hills came sharply into sight, Elijah's dream took substance that would never wane again.

Amy arose, bright and fresh for the day. Upon Elijah the strained vigil of the night had left its mark. There was no longer ecstasy. The settled lines of his face were almost sullen in their intensity. The sparkle died from Amy's eyes and a look of anxious questioning took its place. With the strange unconscious conceit confined to narrow minds, she never dreamed that her husband's preoccupation was a thing entirely apart from herself. Wholly self-centred, her husband's smiling attention meant approbation; preoccupation meant disapproval or resentment. Her sun was her husband's love. In its full warm rays she basked with the happy abandon of a well-fed animal. Preoccupation was the eclipsing shadow that chilled her to the marrow, with no sustaining faith that it was only obscuration, not destruction for all time. When the shadow fell, there was no other suggestion than to beat her sounding soul with a heathen's ardor, in order to frighten from its prey the devouring dragon that would forever

destroy her source of life and light. Now her anxiety grew to pain; her lips were tremulous.

"What have I done to offend you, Elijah?"

"Nothing," he answered abruptly. "I'm not offended. Can't you see that I'm absorbed in my work? I can't spend all my time in telling you that I love you just the same as ever. Why can't you take something for granted?"

Elijah's words were sharp-cut, almost explosive. It was not resentment at Amy; it was the irritation of a dog who is having a bone taken from his jaws.

Amy was cut to the depths of her sensitive soul. Her words were not a reproach, but a hopeless wail.

"It's these miserable orange trees! I wish oranges had never grown in this country. I was so happy before. Now you never think of me. You look at the mountains and the springs and the orange trees, but never at me." Her tears were flowing freely, her lips were tremulous.

Elijah was moved, but without understanding.

"Why! Haven't I always enjoyed showing them to you and talking to you about them? You know that I always tell you every thing that I am doing."

"Yes, I know; but you get just as enthusiastic over them to Ralph Winston and he looks cold all the time and keeps criticising and contradicting you. It's just the same with the other men who

come to look at your work. They don't care one single thing about you, and I do, and I tell you so, but you won't believe me."

Amy's tears had ceased, her voice was steadier; but there was a suggestion of the eager heart hunger that looked from her eyes.

"Winston isn't my wife, Amy —"

"And he doesn't care for you. He says things to you I would not think of saying."

Elijah made an impatient gesture, resuming his interrupted words.

"I have a great idea, a great work. I have only shown what can be done. To actually do it, I must have money. I know these men don't care anything about me; I don't care anything about them, only to get them interested and convinced. If I can only do this, it means fame and fortune to me and, just think of what it all means! Just think! When these great, barren, red hillsides are all covered with orchards; with beautiful houses and thousands of happy, prosperous people; when the snows and rains of the San Bernardinos, instead of running to waste, will flow through tunnels and canals and make the desert blossom as the rose; then they will all say that this is the work of one man, of me, Elijah Berl!" Elijah's eyes kindled anew with the thought which he had elaborated.

Amy saw and was terrified. Her soul shrank and shivered before the vision which he had conjured

up. She could not have stated to herself the reason of her fear. Only one thought was keenly present to her, that henceforth she would be no longer the sole centre of her husband's life.

"I don't want you to be great, Elijah. I want you, just as you are."

Elijah saw the expression of his wife, not the principle which gave it birth. He caught a fleeting glimpse, a faint suggestion of the impelling principle that stimulates all men to the heights of achievement; the pride and glory of laying at the feet of love the laurels of their triumphs, the testimonials of worth wrung from a grudging world; the proud conviction that love is made secure by the assurance that its object is not unworthy. He failed to see that the principles which control a narrow though amiable mind, may be in hopeless antagonism with the broader views of higher mental endowment. He failed to see that each life has its limitations, that when it has given all, it can give no more. The time had not yet come for this knowledge. Therefore it was hidden from his eyes, that when it should come, a hopeless sorrow should come with it. He turned again to Amy.

"I am not always going to be just what I am. I am going to do great things and you will be proud that I am your husband."

"Don't, Elijah! Don't!" Amy clutched Elijah as if already she felt him slipping from her

grasp. "I loved you as you were. I love you as you are. You can never be more dear to me. I don't know, Elijah; I am afraid." She buried her head on his shoulder. "I am afraid I shall not always be everything to you. I am so happy with you now. If I should ever be less happy, it would kill me."

"Nonsense. Don't make pictures to get scared at." He drew his watch from his pocket. "I must go now. You know I promised to see Ralph at Ysleta this morning. Goodbye, and don't scare yourself any more."

Elijah began to unclasp her arms. They were reluctant rather than resisting. He kissed her with a show of affection which was not absent, only obscured by other things; then he saddled his horse and rode away.

Amy stood watching him with hard, dry eyes; with the unconscious superstition of the maiden who with trembling fingers plucks one by one the petals from a prophetic flower. "He loves me, he loves me not." She stood watching for a motion, a gesture which should assure her that her husband's thoughts were of her, even as hers were of him, making herself the wretched plaything of senseless Fate, instead of resting tranquil in the surety that she was its master.

Elijah was absorbed in himself. He grew but a speck on the trail to Amy's watching eyes. There

was not a motion which she could distort into a recognition of her existence. The last petal had fallen. "He loves me not."

CHAPTER THREE

Ysleta was booming and was being boomed. Avenues of graded sand, cleared of their desert growth, stretched in prim right angles far out into the horizon. White posts with staring, black numerals heralded city lots and bounded patches of cactus and chaparral which were thus protected from further molestation, and gave asylum to gophers and prairie dogs who had not lost their wits in the booming hubbub for the sole reason that nature had given them none to lose. Straining teams dragged great ploughs that tore through matted roots and turned furrows which slid back behind the parting share. Other sweating horses pulled scrapers of sand from dusty hummocks and plumped their loads in dustier hollows. Rows of bedraggled palms trailed out behind gangs of burrowing men or gathered in quincunx clumps where a glaring signboard proclaimed a city park. Thumping hammers and clinking trowels were raising uncouth buildings around the central plaza, adding other grotesque monstrosities to those which had already attained perfection in every detail that rebelled against a sense of beauty. Throngs

of men and women trailed ankle deep through the new-turned sand and broke up into knots of animated discussion, or paused before a map of Ysleta to listen to a perspiring real estate agent repeating with tireless enthusiasm "the beauties of eternal sunshine in a land where burning heat and blasting cold never entered; a land where perennial spring went hand in hand with perennial autumn, where seed time and harvest trailed side by side, where dividing lines between summer and winter solstice were but meaningless numerals in the cycles of succeeding years; a land that for untold ages had slumbered and waxed fat with accumulated richness and where the sun had stored its genial warmth against the day when suffering humanity should wake to the knowledge of what California was and hasten to enjoy her stored up treasures."

Blaring trumpets and booming drums accompanied aligned men, gorgeous with purple and gold; beribboned four-in-hands with varnished carriages trailed along behind, and a brazen-throated herald proclaimed a bounteous repast free to all who would honor his master by partaking.

"Fall in! Fall in!" and knots of men balanced to the swing of the band and wheeled into line, choked with dust, blinded with dust, and covered with dust which the tearing ploughshares had

softened up, and which eager feet were beating into the air.

Into this bustle and blare, Elijah Berl rode as he had ridden many times of late. Unmoved, save for a contemptuous pity, he looked down upon the hurrying crowd, crazed by the lust of wealth, who bought today to sell tomorrow, each knowing that some would be caught in the reaction that was sure to come, but each steadfast in the confidence that his own good sense would protect him from the general ruin. He looked down to where the Sangre de Cristo, no longer an impetuous torrent, seeped lazily through its bed of shining sand; at the mass of tangled shrubs and clinging vines quickened by its waters into a riotous growth that blossomed and fruited in the sensuous sun. Over his shoulder, he looked at the distant slopes from which he had come. At the open door of a redwood cottage he dismounted and entered.

"Hello, Ralph!"

At the salutation, Winston's compact athletic figure straightened from his drawing-board.

"Oh, hello, Elijah! You're just the man I wanted to see."

"Have you decided yet?" Elijah's voice was eager.

"Do you still want me?"

"Yes. It's tomorrow now. If this is too soon, tomorrow and tomorrow are yet to come."

"Well, Elijah, if it's all right, my answer is yes."

Elijah took Winston's hand in both of his own; his eyes spoke the words his tongue could not utter.

"It's going to be uphill work, Elijah, but I guess we'll manage it."

"Of course we will." Elijah was striding up and down the little office. He paused and looked thoughtfully out of the window.

"This hasn't got into your blood yet, eh?" he jerked his thumb toward the hustling street.

"Not much! It would be fun to watch this racket if a fellow hadn't a conscience. Do you know, I'm getting to believe that men and things are built on the same lines. The sweeter the wine, the sharper the vinegar, and you may pound my head for a drum if the smartest man doesn't make the biggest kind of a fool."

"I guess that's so, if he lets himself go. I'm not going to let go."

Winston looked at Elijah with an expression that might be interpreted as jocular or serious.

"Hold tight. I've seen men as sharp as you, crowding another fellow out and blowing hot air into his balloon."

"Are you getting scared on my account?" Elijah smiled, looking at Winston with confident half-closed eyes.

"No. If your bearings begin to smoke, I'm go-

ing to cool you off. It isn't going to be all lavender and roses, Elijah. You'll find me a pretty trying party at times, I give you fair warning."

Elijah turned from the window, looking straight at Winston.

"I'm going to begin right now. I've been at work all night. Now cool off and let's get to work."

Winston sat down before the drawing-board.

"Here's the map of the canal line. It isn't inked in yet, but you can see how it's going to come out. There must be two long tunnels; but that's no great matter. It's one of three things. Tunnels, aqueducts, or inverted siphons. It's a toss-up between tunnels and aqueducts, so far as cost is concerned. Siphons will cost about half, but you know what a choke or a break means, so out go siphons."

"You favor tunnels?"

"By all means. The ditch line is shortened by them, anyway. You'll save there."

Elijah gazed long and lovingly at the map, then looked up with a relieved sigh.

"Just a little dam will turn the whole stream into the canal."

"Yes. Just a little dam. That's easy." Winston drew a dust cloth over the map and weighted it down. "I wish I could get reliable data on the size of the dam it will take to turn some of this fool-money into a channel of common sense. What

I am afraid of is, that when this boom breaks, the fools who have not been ruined, will be too badly scared to put money into government bonds, let alone an irrigation plant, and before they recover their wits, they'll either forget that there is such a place as California, or use it to slug themselves with when they feel another fool attack coming on."

"You leave that to me. I've got something more to show than a sand-flat pegged full of white stakes. Oranges will do better than that. Dry hillsides at nothing a square mile are going to be a thousand an acre when we get water on them."

"Let up, Elijah. Keep your chips off from that spot. That's a safer proposition than Ysleta lots with hot-air values, but it's the same kind of a wheel after all. If you once get the hum of it in your ears you'll go to pieces like all the rest."

"Are your estimates completed?"

"Yes; ready to be typed. You think they'd better be typed first, don't you?"

"Yes. We can have them printed afterward. I don't want anything gorgeous. Just plain, conservative figures. I have my statement of what has been done in the three years on my ranch. There is just one thing I have left out. It would be a telling thing to put in, but I think we can use it to better advantage by keeping it to ourselves."

"What's that?"

Elijah drew a neatly folded sheet from his pocket. It was filled with columns of figures.

"It's an idea of my own. What do you think of it?"

Winston looked rapidly over the sheet, then gave a low, meditative whistle.

"Are you sure of this?"

"Dead sure. I've been making observations with self-registering thermometers. That's the result." Elijah pointed to the sheet.

"A frostless belt!" Winston snatched the sheet from his drawing-board and bent over the map, one finger on the sheet, the other eagerly tracing lines on the surface of the map. "That's the greatest thing yet! There is a big fortune for all of us in that alone."

Elijah half closed his eyes, his teeth bared with a smile suggestive of malice.

"May I offer you some of your advice to me?"

"Certainly, and I'll take it too, when I need it. But say, Elijah, what in the name of the immortals do you want to leave this out for? It's the most telling thing we've got."

Elijah's eyes narrowed closely.

"I haven't got control of the whole belt yet. That's one thing. Another is, that when orange lands get under way, there's going to be a demand that the frostless belt isn't going to supply."

Winston's face set.

"You don't mean that you are going to sell lands for orange ranches that you know won't grow oranges?"

"I don't *know* that they won't grow oranges," Elijah answered doggedly. "I only know what will."

"You are going to let people find that out at their own expense?"

"Why not? That's the way I got my information."

There was a contemptuous look on Winston's face.

"Well, I'll be hanged. God does move in a mysterious way, if you are a fair sample of his stamping ground."

Elijah's face set with resentment. He straightened his lips for an angry retort, but restrained himself. He answered sullenly.

"I tell you, I don't know that the land won't grow oranges. I only know what will. I'm going to get control of this frostless belt. I found it and there's nothing wrong in taking advantage of it. Why not tell the Mexicans who own it now and are glad to sell for a dollar an acre, that their land will grow oranges and that it's worth a thousand?" There was a triumphant note in his last words.

Winston was ready to dismiss this phase of the question.

"Don't ask me. You settle that between you. I

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notice that the Almighty isn't a hard one to manage when you take him in your lap and reason with him. He usually comes around to your way of thinking."

Elijah's puritanism blinded his eyes to Winston's sarcasm. He saw only the apparently sacrilegious blasphemy of his words. He stood aghast as a superstitious heathen before his smitten idol. His five years of struggle in the West had changed him in no essential point. It had only given room for the full development of the motive that had lain dormant in his former cramped surroundings. Side by side, yet wholly independent the one of the other, his faith in Divine guidance, his reverence for God, his New England land-hunger, his greed for wealth, his lust for power, had grown and were growing with every new opportunity. He had learned to keep in the background, to some extent, the expression of his fanatical beliefs, not because his personal faith had waned, but in reality because he saw that Divine guidance had less convincing weight with others than the logic of hard, common sense. He learned only that which he wished to learn, believed only that which he wished to believe, did only that which he wished to do; not because of conscious hypocrisy, but because his very faith in God's guidance had blinded his eyes to its recognition and forbidden him to question his own desires.

Elijah thought quickly. Even Winston was hardly aware of the pause that ensued after his last words.

"We're drifting from our point. The water question comes first. The other can come up later."

"A good deal later, I hope," Winston replied drily. "Let's get over to Miss Lonsdale's office. She's doing my clerical work now."

Winston was not slow in noting signs and he had seen a good many in his relations with Elijah which had disquieted him. He went steadily on his way, however, confident in his own strength. He gathered a few papers in his hand and with Elijah went out into the street. They entered another redwood cottage that bore a sign, announcing, "Helen Lonsdale, Stenographer, Typewriter and Notary Public."

"Miss Lonsdale, my friend, Mr. Berl. We want some work done right away. Can you attend to it?"

Miss Lonsdale acknowledged the introduction, swept aside a litter of papers, stripped a half-written page from her machine, drew forth a note-book, and, after pushing her cuffs from her wrists, assumed a waiting attitude.

Winston addressed Elijah.

"I guess you're fixed now. You go on with Helen and I'll get back to my work. If you need me, I'll come in." Then he left the office.

Elijah had all but forgotten his business in the contemplation of the girl before him. It was with an almost unconscious feeling of resentment that he heard Winston call her familiarly "Helen."

"I am afraid, Miss Lonsdale," he began, when he was interrupted.

"You can call me Helen. Every one does. It saves time. Time is money, pretty fast too, just now." The words were spoken with a light ripple.

It faintly occurred to Elijah that he had heard something like her laughter before. There was a suggestion of fresh, crisp air, the opening of spring, of young green plants pushing through the black soil beside New England brooks. There was a further suggestion that very hard stones in the brook caused the soft ripples. One look in the great, liquid, black eyes that absorbed everything and gave back nothing, took away the disagreeable impression and replaced it with one more agreeable. There was no perceptible pause, for while Elijah's thoughts were busy with Helen Lonsdale, his hands were assorting his papers. He turned to Helen.

"I was going to say, that I am afraid this work will be rather dry."

Helen vouchsafed no reply, but, with eyes now bent upon her note-book and pencil ready poised for action, waited for Elijah. He began rather slowly and awkwardly. He was unaccustomed to dictation, and besides he was conscious of Helen

Lonsdale's beauty; but more and more rapidly he went on, as he forgot all else in the absorbing interest of his subject. He sorted paper from paper, went from point to point, clearly and logically, down to the last figure that Winston had given him. He hardly noted the flying fingers and moving hand that drew lines, and hooks, and dots, and dashes with the graceful ease and regularity of an inanimate machine. At length he paused, folding his papers.

Helen threw down her pencil and straightened her cramped fingers.

"Well!" she exclaimed. "You have given me the time of my life! I was on the point of calling you off once or twice; but I didn't. I'll read it over to you now and see if I have made any mistakes."

Elijah's face was eager, partly from Helen's indirect praise, but more from the enthusiasm of his subject.

"Aren't you tired?" he asked.

"Tired!" she repeated. "This doesn't make me tired. It's more fun than a toboggan slide. It's these everlasting drones who make me tired. Fellows who haven't anything to say and who don't know how to get at it." She took her note-book and began reading rapidly. Elijah listened, watching her through his narrowed eyes. She laid her note-book down.

"How is it?"

"Perfect. You've got everything."

"That's a great piece of work you've got blocked out." Helen's voice was approving.

"The work is not mine."

"No?" Helen's eyes were opened wide.

"No." Elijah's face drooped in reverent lines. "It has been given me to do."

"A-a-h!" Helen dared to commit herself no farther. She could not trust her eyes even. Her lids veiled them and her face assumed a look of non-committal interest. Elijah was a new species. She had no pigeonhole, even in the wide experience of her limited years, ready made into which she could thrust him.

Elijah felt impelled to go farther. He wanted to look again into the great, black eyes. He steered boldly into a sea where many a time before no less confident mariners had as boldly entered and had come to grief.

He told of his coming to California, of his life after reaching his goal, and how, little by little, the great work he was engaged upon had been revealed to him. He did not speak freely at first, only when he saw recognition and appreciation in Helen's face. If she was surprised at the freedom with which Elijah spoke to her, she was too wise to show it. Though not heralding the fact, she never tried to conceal that she was not in business for her

health or from purely philanthropic motives. She was no innocent fledgeling, nor was her knowledge purchased with sacrifice. Individuality was the atmosphere which surrounded her; an atmosphere where everyone was somebody or nobody. She was simply determined to be somebody. She was beautiful. She knew that. She had a clear, alert mind, a quick grasp, a ready tact, a capacity for throwing herself heart and soul into any work that came to her hands to do. She valued these as effective tools with which to shape her ambition, to individualize herself, to get on in the world. She had a heart; but of this she was not conscious. She had innate honesty and she was a woman. It had never occurred to her that a woman's heart and a woman's sense of honor were liable to become paradoxes with the certain death of one. She looked frankly at Elijah, not concealing her interest.

"Your work is the kind of thing that's going to save this part of California." Helen spoke with conviction.

"You don't approve of all this?" Elijah glanced toward the bustling street.

"No. You've been giving me figures, now I'll give you some. This city, two miles wide, is laid out in streets three miles long. Sixty blocks long and forty wide; two thousand four hundred blocks. At one hundred dollars a front foot (that was the price a few minutes ago), Ysleta is selling at the rate of

two hundred and fifty-three million, four hundred and forty thousand dollars, unimproved."

Elijah looked at her in surprise. She too had been thinking in figures for herself.

"Who gave you these figures?"

Helen laughed. She had noted Elijah's surprise and had divined its cause.

"Wait. That isn't all. Before there can be any solid returns in this investment, it will have to be trebled at least, for sewers, pavements, sidewalks, and buildings. We will leave out odd hundred thousands, only millions count now." She smiled. "Seven hundred and fifty million dollars at least. Let's see about the population. At five hundred and twenty to the block, Ysleta should have a population of one million, two hundred and forty thousand. Quite a neat little town for a new country!"

Elijah's surprise grew. Helen was not even consulting notes.

"The total population of California isn't a million today. Most of these are miners, the next greater part live in towns. Hardly half are engaged in agriculture. How would Ysleta be fed, where would it get money to pay?"

Elijah's face showed still greater surprise.

"What put these figures into your head?"

Helen laughed sarcastically.

"I was advised to invest in building lots, so I looked the matter up. I am giving you these figures

so you can see that I know how to appreciate what your work means." Her face sobered. She screwed paper and carbons into her machine and opened her note-book. She did not raise her eyes from her work.

"Don't wait, Mr. Berl. I'll have the work done in three hours."

Elijah left the office half dazed. Every word of Helen Lonsdale smote hard and deep. Not alone because of their surprising nature, but because his own work had never before appeared so worth while. Heretofore it had only appeared great in itself. Now it stood out gigantic by contrast. He was pleasantly conscious of another element that was entering his life for the first time; the sympathetic interest of an intelligent woman.

Punctually at the appointed time, Elijah returned. Helen was still busily at work.

"Am I too soon?" he asked.

She handed him a neatly enclosed package.

"That's all right, I think. Do you want to open an account, or will this be all?"

Elijah spoke very deliberately.

"I will open an account. I shall have more work."

"Very well. I send out monthly statements to my regular customers." Her eyes were again following her note-book, her fingers working at the rattling keys.

CHAPTER FOUR

It was well that the work which Helen was doing when Elijah left the office was mechanical, else it might have lacked the finish which made her in demand above all others. She could not keep her thoughts from this man and his work. With a frown, she glanced at her watch. Returning it to her belt, she drew her finished work from her machine and began to put the office in order. She stood absently before a mirror as she pinned her hat in place, turning with perfunctory pats here and there, touching a stray lock into order and smoothing down her gown. She passed out into the street, locking the door behind her, and turned to Winston's office. Her light footsteps as she entered, did not arouse his attention. For a moment she stood, looking at him as he bent over his work.

"You are cordial, I must confess."

Ralph looked up.

"Ah! What's the matter?" he concluded, noting her sober face.

"What is the matter?"

"Why, you're as solemn as an owl."

"Do you object to my sitting down for a moment?"

"Not for two moments. I'm glad to see you." Winston rose hastily and swung a chair into position.

"That's better," she approved.

"Good! Now if you'll get better, I shall know where I'm at."

"I've come here to find out where *I'm* at."

"If you are lost, it's the first time, I'm thinking, and I'm not so sure that I can set you straight."

"I'll take my chances. Who is Elijah Berl?"

Winston laughed.

"Oh, he's gotten hold of you, has he?"

"No, he hasn't; but I want to get hold of him to the extent of five thousand dollars. That is the limit of my cash money."

Winston smiled tolerantly.

"Elijah has certainly missed his calling. If he can work you up five thousand dollars' worth in an hour or so, I'll play him the limit against Wall street."

"No you won't. You don't know Elijah Berl."

"Then what are you asking me about him for?"

"Oh! that was just a starter. I had to begin somewhere."

"Isn't five thousand dollars a pretty heavy starter for you, Helen?" Winston asked the question soberly, for he saw that Helen was in earnest.

"No. I've kept out of Ysleta because it wasn't

worth while. I want to get into Las Cruces because it is."

"It may be, Helen. It is full of promise, but it may not mature. I know the proposition pretty thoroughly and I know Elijah Berl. The elements of this may not be so solid as they appear."

"The watershed is all right, isn't it?"

"Without a question."

"The water can be brought from the reservoir to the lands?"

"No question about that, either."

"And the land is fertile and suited to oranges?"

"That's true too, but it needs money."

"You'll get that all right."

"I expect to, without doubt."

Helen had spoken with growing animation.

"Then the whole doubt in your mind centres in Elijah Berl?"

"You've hit it exactly."

"And yet you are a friend of Elijah's?" There was a touch of contempt in her voice.

"Yes."

"Then I must say that I don't value your friendship quite so highly as I did." Helen made no attempt to conceal her disapproval.

Winston spoke deliberately, weighing every word.

"I'm sorry to hear you say that, Helen. Your friendship means a great deal to me. Just remem-

ber that in a way you have come to me for advice. If not advice exactly, you really ask for the approval of what I cannot approve without reserve. I have counted you as my friend. If I have seemed to be a traitor to Elijah, it is only that I might be true to you. I would not say to any one else what I have said to you."

Helen's resentment died away before Winston's words.

"You haven't answered my first question yet. You seem able, if you only will."

"In a way, yes. Elijah Berl and I are partners."

"Partners!" Helen did not try to conceal her surprise.

"Yes. The agreement was signed today. Elijah was more than generous in his terms."

"And yet you could say what you did of him!"

"Yes. I gave him fair warning. I didn't tell him in so many words that I distrusted him; I simply said that our different views of things might in the future bring us into conflict. If he couldn't understand that, it was useless to say more."

"And yet, distrusting him, you have tied yourself to him. It doesn't seem quite harmonious to me and not a bit like you."

"It isn't harmonious. Nothing is, for that matter, unless you make it so."

"Then the success of the whole business depends upon your ability to manage Elijah Berl?"

"That's about the gist of it."

"Yours must be a comfortable state of mind." There was sarcasm in the voice.

"I am speaking as freely to you, Helen, as I do to myself. I thought our standing would allow that."

Helen made no reply. She sat gazing absently into the street. She was in an uncomfortable frame of mind. Twice that day she had been swept hither and thither under influences outside herself. It was unusual for her and it was discomposing. The Las Cruces Irrigation Company had looked so safe as a permanent and a big paying investment, and Elijah Berl himself had stirred her as she had never before been stirred. And now Ralph Winston had told her in so many words that she did not know what she was about. She resented this hotly. She resented it the more strongly, because she recognized the injustice she was doing Ralph. It was long before she had herself under control. At length she turned from the street and looked at Winston.

"I had a letter from home today."

Winston responded eagerly to her changed mood.

"How are they all?"

"Just as well as ever. Mother says that father bobbed up from under that anti-debris decision like a cork in salt water. He says he is going to put up a dam that the debris commission can't look

over in a week's climbing. Jimmie is his ablest assistant."

"Little rascal! Say, Helen, you ought to take him in hand and make him go to college. You're the only one who can manage him. He has the making of one of the biggest engineers in the country."

"Why don't you try your hand, Ralph? Mother says that you are his god yet. When he gets cornered, he insists that his way is just what Mr. Winston would do, and there he sticks. Father and mother both ask when you are coming back."

Winston shook his head almost regretfully.

"I sometimes wish I had never left, but that's too late now. When I get a little despondent, the roar of the monitors eating into the gravel, the swish of the water and the clatter of boulders in the sluices get into my ears till I'm nearly wild."

"That is all over now. When I came away there were only a few discouraged miners digging in the banks and listening for the officers to come around and stop even that."

Winston went on even more regretfully.

"And I remember when you and I went barefoot, wading around with gold pans and scrapping as to which had the biggest pan—"

Helen rose to go. Her intuition told her that they were on dangerous ground.

"Old things and times are gone. We have put

away childish things and gold pans, for something new."

Winston took her hand. A momentary pressure on her part and she withdrew it. She could not look into his eyes.

"Be careful about the new, Helen. There's fool's gold in these diggings too."

"Which reminds me, our last scrap as children was over that very thing."

Then the door closed behind her and Winston was alone.

CHAPTER FIVE

A country that has yielded a billion and a half of gold is, perforce, well and favorably known to the uttermost parts of the earth. Though the stream of yellow wealth diminishes, or even ceases to flow, yet the channel is carved through which the thoughts of men longingly roll. Upon such a land no limit of impossibility is placed. Upon what has been, the faith of man lays the foundations of nobler structures yet to be. The structures may rise and fall, but the foundation yet remains. It matters not to the builders of golden castles that, between the gold fields of California and the line that marked another nation, the whole of New England could lie, like an island in a sea of desert sand; California was yet California, and the Pactolean sands of the Cascades and the Sierras spread their yellow sheen over the whole vast expanse of mountain, and valley, and desert.

Winston was right. The gold that had flowed to the Eastward was now returning in heavy waves. From the pockets of idle tourists, it was scattered with lavish hand. From the pockets of gamblers,

it came also; gamblers who, with trembling fingers, placed their gold on checkered town-lots, and waited for the spinning wheel to return it with usury, and went out white and haggard when the croupier declared against them. It came in the pockets of shrewd-eyed men who parted with it for a proper consideration, or not at all.

Into this stream of wealth, Winston was planning to build his dam. His efforts were rewarded more abundantly and sooner than either he or the more sanguine Elijah had expected.

Elijah had suggested a movement on the speculators in Ysleta lots, but against this Winston had set his hand.

"We don't want floaters; we want stayers. I met a man in the crowd yesterday who's a stayer all right. I think he'll come in. If he does, it will make me feel good in more ways than one. He's got money and he's got a head that tells him where there's more."

"What's his name?"

"Seymour. He'll be in, in a day or two, to look the matter up. That young orange grove of yours took his hard head by storm. He didn't do a thing yesterday but roll those navels that Amy gave him, in his fist, all the way down. He would have rubbed them under his nose if he hadn't been afraid to trust his teeth. As it was, he kept smelling of his

fingers. Didn't say a word!" Winston laughed. "It makes us feel good, doesn't it, Elijah?"

A few days later, they were again in Winston's office, awaiting the coming of Seymour.

Winston turned to Elijah.

"You remember Helen Lonsdale?"

"Yes, what about her?" Elijah looked up questioningly.

"What did you make out of her?"

"She appeared to be a very able young woman."

"You don't think she would get stampeded very easily, do you?"

"I hardly think so." Elijah smiled. "She gave me some very telling reasons for keeping out of Ysleta lots."

"And you gave her some pretty convincing reasons for thinking that orange trees on a hillside would grow better crops than corner stakes on a sand dune."

"What makes you think so?"

"Because you hadn't been gone an hour before she was in here and wanted to know if she could get into this building on the ground floor. She said she had a few thousands that she wanted to put in a good thing."

"You told her 'yes,' didn't you?" Elijah's voice was eager.

"I told her 'no.'"

"You ought to have taken her up."

"I don't know about that. This business is a sure thing one way, but in another, it isn't. It's a big thing. If we can swing it, it's all right. If we can't, it's going to go hard with the small fry. I may want to look into those big black eyes of hers again sometime."

"Why haven't you introduced me to Helen Lonsdale before?"

Winston was surprised, more at the manner of Elijah's question than at the question itself. He shifted the onus of the surprise to Elijah's shoulders.

"Why should I?" he asked bluntly.

"That's a Yankee trick, not a Californian's," retorted Elijah.

"I'm not too old to learn."

Elijah laughed consciously.

"It doesn't matter. We're acquainted now."

"It's up to you to make it worth her while to keep it up. She's rather particular about her friends."

Elijah was irritated, and not for the first time in his relations with Winston. Winston seemed to him to be contradictory. At times he was deferential to the point of enthusiasm; at times reserved, if not cynical. Elijah was not a close reasoner and he failed to understand that Winston's principles were a kind of moral straight-edge which he

applied impartially. Winston had no hesitancy in calling attention to discrepancies.

"Helen Londsdale is a mighty bright girl. She may be of use to us," hazarded Elijah.

Winston's momentary glance was searching.

"I expect she will be," he answered curtly.

After a short pause, Elijah resumed the broken conversation.

"You're going for Seymour?"

"Oh, yes. That's all right. A few hundred thousand wouldn't hurt Seymour. Five thousand would break Helen Lonsdale. Beside, if Seymour takes hold of it, it's going."

Elijah changed the point bluntly.

"Well, who's going to do the talking? You've done all the work and made out the estimates; you'd better. We don't want to make any mistakes."

"That's all right Elijah, but it isn't always the folks who make the cartridges that shoot the straightest. I'll stand by to furnish ammunition if you run short, but you work the trigger." Winston laughed. "I loaded him with estimates and facts. They're good so far as they go; but you know that champagne is pretty flat without the fizz. Here he comes now."

A man of medium height entered the office. There was more than a suggestion of iron about him. Iron-gray hair and mustache; steely, quick moving eyes, but not restless; hard lines that blocked out

close-set lips; a firm decided step. Withal, a not unpleasant man; but one who suggested that the pleasure of acquiring money and the pleasure of spending it, had appropriate and distinct seasons. He acknowledged Winston's introduction with a quick look at Elijah.

"From what Mr. Winston said, I expected to meet an older man, Mr. Berl."

"That's all right, Mr. Seymour," Winston put in. "We don't put new wine in old bottles out here. This is a new country. Elijah is a new man, and he's chuck full of new ideas."

"I'm getting near enough to the age limit to make your figure rather doubtful, so far as I am concerned." Seymour's features relaxed in a grim smile as he pointed to his gray hair.

"We don't count a horse old, so long as he can kick the top rail off a fence."

Seymour looked closely at Winston, but made no reply. He began to talk with Elijah. At first, Elijah was conscious of the momentous importance of the interview; but this did not prevent him from grasping the import of Seymour's questions and answering clearly and to the point. Gradually he lost himself in his subject and poured forth fact after fact, estimate on estimate, with such rapidity that Seymour felt compelled at times to interrupt him.

"This is new business to me, Mr. Berl. I can't

keep up with you." He spoke sharply, almost impatiently, but his manner showed that he was deeply impressed, both with the proposition and with Elijah himself.

"That is a strong presentation of your proposition, Mr. Berl. Now I want a few definite answers to definite questions. As I understand you, you propose to do something entirely new. What warrant have you for believing that oranges can be successfully grown in this district? Oranges are a tropical fruit."

"People are used to thinking that oranges are a tropical fruit. They aren't. Look at Spain, and France, and Italy. They are famous for this very fruit. Here," Elijah swept his hands around, "those conditions are reproduced. Here are the San Bernadinos, there the Pacific, between are desert hills. Bring water to this sunshine and soil, and California will become the garden of the New World."

Seymour smiled at Elijah's enthusiasm. His words were fervid, but Seymour realized their truth.

"That's all right for Spain, and Italy and the rest; but those countries are only a few hours by water from three hundred millions of people, while California is six days by rail from sixty millions, and high rate express at that."

Elijah's face lost none of its assurance; but his

eyes half closed as he grasped Seymour's import. He answered with less fire but no less conviction.

"I'll take your estimate of sixty millions and six days express. Suppose that each of those sixty millions ate only two oranges a year, that calls for one hundred and twenty millions. If these oranges sold at five cents, there are six million dollars in a year. That's worth while, isn't it?"

Seymour nodded assent and Elijah resumed. He pointed out the cost of the land, of water, the care of the orchards, express rates and other charges.

"Taking all this into account, your net yield on your investment will be at least fifteen percent."

Seymour again smiled.

"That's all right too; but it hasn't been proved that California will produce one hundred and twenty million oranges."

Elijah was nettled. It irritated him to be questioned too closely. He was too thoroughly convinced, too thoroughly in earnest.

"No one believed in the Western hemisphere till Columbus found it."

Seymour paid no attention to Elijah's impatience. He had a concentrated look on his face. He spoke again sharply and decidedly.

"You believe in this thing. So do I. If suitable terms can be arranged, I am prepared to back my belief with cash."

"To what extent?" Elijah asked briefly.

"A hundred thousand or so. Think over what you will do and I will be in again, in an hour. If your terms are all right, I'll get the money for you at once." He left the office.

Elijah turned jubilantly to Winston.

"We're all right now."

"For a starter." Winston was sober.

"What do you mean?" Elijah spoke sharply.

"We've got a hundred thousand dollars. That's one thing. Now it's up to us to make it pay. That's another." Winston did not lack confidence or faith. He was realizing his responsibilities.

They began arranging terms for the transfer of an interest. Elijah, full of the enthusiasm of success, could hardly pin himself down to details. His years of dreams were being realized. He was looking upon a step as taken. With his foot as yet hardly lifted, already he was looking toward other paths. Winston held him down to the present.

At the appointed hour, Seymour reappeared. The terms offered were satisfactory.

"I must get back East and attend to my other business. I shall have to trust this to you."

Perhaps it was a mistake; but Winston had the feeling that Seymour's eyes rested upon him with his last words, that it was to him that the work was entrusted, that upon him was the responsibility, that he would be the one called to account. This

did not oppress him; it sobered him. As Seymour finally left the office, Winston turned to Elijah.

"It's up to us now to show what there is in us."

CHAPTER SIX

It did not follow because Seymour had promised to back the Las Cruces Water Company to the extent of one hundred thousand dollars, that he intended to put in that amount of his own money; nor because he had promised a certain sum, that that sum was the limit. He had become thoroughly convinced that the enterprise was well conceived and that with proper management it was bound to succeed and to "succeed big." He wisely concluded that those who had conceived the project and had figured out so minutely the cost and detail, were the proper ones to trust with its execution. He was too cold blooded to be figurative, but Winston's figure to Elijah exactly expressed his attitude of mind. Elijah furnished the fizz of enthusiasm, while Winston supplied the necessary body to the wine, with his well-balanced, matter-of-fact mind. There was nothing in his contract to prevent his disposing at par of one half of the two hundred thousand shares which he had acquired at fifty, and this was the step which he proposed to take and which he did take. He too regarded the laborer as worthy of his hire.

Mr. Seymour was a business man. He was shrewd and he was very successful. It did not necessarily follow that he was unscrupulous. In fact, from a purely business standpoint, he was not; but he had no Quixotic limitations to the end that he was his brother's keeper. The world was full of disastrous mistakes; he took it as he found it. He did not count as a sin of his own, the omission to do good unto others when opportunity offered; but he regarded the opportunity as an indication of sin or at least of poor judgment in his fellow. He was a church communicant in good and regular standing; but religion was one thing, business another. He did not search the scriptures either for approbation or for defense. He acted upon the principle that offenses must be and that woe was the lot of the one through whom they came. The woe that was visited upon the offender was in reality no less a reward of merit than the benefit which accrued to the one who was wise enough to take advantage of the offense. He never pointed to the decalogue with the smug assertion that this had been kept from his youth up. If his business record did not show this, words would be useless. He wasted no love on his neighbor, for love was a dissipater of energy. Love engendered pity, pity sacrifice, and sacrifice precluded success. Every tub must stand on its own bottom. If his neighbor's tub leaked, it was his neighbor's fault for not keeping it calked. His

neighbor had no ground for complaint if the liquor which he spilled, was gathered by a more fitting vessel.

Mr. Seymour's one hundred thousand shares of Las Cruces had cost him nothing, save a little energy. If he did no better, he would have so much clear. That was worth while. If Winston and Berl made a mess of the affair, that was no concern of his. One man's extremity was to him another man's opportunity. He intended to be the other man. Elijah was an enthusiast, Winston a professional man. Enthusiasm would inflate iridescent bubbles, professional pride would be an absorbing end in itself. Both were essential, neither would necessarily supply the third element of success, business acumen. At the proper time he would supply this himself and at his own price. In any event, he would be perfectly safe.

The orderly bustle which succeeded Seymour's departure, argued well for the success of the new company. Experienced Ysleta boomers saw in "Las Cruces" a new kind of boom, and beyond offering to put their experience and methods at the service of the new company, did nothing further. The idea of taking up land on a venture near Elijah's ranch, was discussed, but the conclusion was reached that this land was too far from Ysleta to be advantageous and that attention distracted from their own kettle of fish would result in the

deadening of the fires that were keeping their own pot boiling.

The division of the entailed labor fell naturally. The engineering work demanded Winston's presence in the field. The office duties fell to Elijah. It was Winston who suggested to Elijah the necessity of a bookkeeper and that there was no one better fitted in every way than Helen Lonsdale. Winston had no doubts of Elijah's intentional integrity and he had great confidence in Helen Lonsdale's ability both in business and in looking out for herself. So she was installed as an essential feature of the company. She felt herself in a position of great and growing responsibility.

Days slipped into weeks and weeks into months with the easy motion of well-organized work. Helen hardly surpassed Winston's expectations, but as he darted in and out of the office, full of his work, he felt no more than a passing sense of satisfaction at the readiness with which everything that he wanted came to his hands. Helen might have a personal pride in never being caught unprepared, but she never displayed the emotion. It was Winston himself who was first caught off his guard. He rushed into the office one afternoon with a look of annoyance, almost of disgust on his face.

"I've made a mess, Helen. I want you to help me out."

"Short of powder at No. 1?" Helen hardly looked up from her work.

"Yes. How did you know?"

"I ordered two tons from the magazine. It's on its way there now."

"Good! But how did you know that I was short?"

"From the reports. I thought you wouldn't be in, so I ordered it."

"You are a jewel, Helen. I haven't had time to tell you so before, but I've known it all along."

"Jewels are ornamental, not useful."

"You are both."

Helen glanced at the clock.

"Office hours aren't over yet and the company isn't paying me to trade sugar plums."

"All right. I'll see you off shift sometime."

Elijah's work kept him much in the office and he was held to business quite as closely as was Winston. Helen showed her appreciation of his work by saying nothing, but doing everything that came to her hands. He longed to drink of the sparkling waters of his dreams, and with all that was in her, Helen was trying to convert these iridescent dreams into material facts. Elijah longed also to see Helen's eyes kindle, to hear her words of commendation; but she never spoke now of his idea. Thus it happened that one phase of his nature was hungered, the other fully satisfied.

Poor Amy was the only party to the new order of things who was unhappy. She had accepted the necessity of Elijah's absence at the Ysleta office, not with resignation, but with unprotesting grief. She regarded this as the dregs of her cup of bitterness; but when she learned of Elijah's assistant, she discovered her mistake. She mourned over his absence, yet utterly refused to consider the idea of moving to Ysleta. He must come to her at her bidding; she could not bring herself to go to him at his. This was her touchstone of love and devotion. It was failing her, and in sackcloth and ashes she was mourning it. She made a brave attempt at cheerfulness when Elijah broached the subject, but she could neither keep the color in her cheeks nor her lips steady when she made reply.

"Don't ask me, Elijah. I can't bear it."

"Why?" he asked in surprise.

"Because," she paused for a moment. "We have been here almost four years, just you, and I and the children. Every spot of it is a part of you. It would be like death to leave it. While you are away, I shall look forward to your coming back. If I should go to Ysleta, you wouldn't be coming back."

"Of course not. I'd be there all the time. You'd have lots of company. I could run in to lunch and bring my friends." Elijah lifted his head and squared his shoulders. He caught not the slightest

glimpse of Amy's real feeling. His words and gestures showed that only too plainly even to her.

Amy smiled wanly.

"I wouldn't have you all to myself there. I would rather have you all to myself part of the time, than part of you all the time." It was a tremendous thought for Amy. She almost stood in awe of herself over its utterance.

"You are a silly goose." Elijah caught her in his arms and swung her to and fro as if she were a child. "You have me all the time, wherever I am."

Amy lay in his arms with closed eyes. The color came back to her face. It was only a dream; a dream of what had been. She knew it was only a dream and she tried to close her mental eyes to this knowledge. She was aroused when Elijah set her on her feet.

"I have lots to do at the office now."

Amy's face showed a sudden gleam of inspiration.

"Couldn't I be in the office with you?"

"Of course not, goose. You'd be in the way."

"Is the bookkeeper in the way?" The words were almost gasped.

"Of course not. She'd be in the way if she wasn't there."

"Why?" The word was spoken perforce and with fear.

"Because I couldn't get along without her. She's no end of help to me in my work."

"Couldn't I help you? I would try hard."

Elijah laughed long and loud. Not brutally, at least he had no intention of brutality; but the thought of Amy's doing Helen Lonsdale's work incited his thoughtless mirth. It was inconsiderate rather than thoughtless, for he had not personified Amy's words. Her white face brought the truth home. He grew sober.

"Not the way you mean, Amy. You will have to help me in your way, and Miss Lonsdale in another. Goodbye, dear. Don't scare yourself with pictures, as I said before."

Amy watched him as on a former occasion; then she had thought her lot hard. She would now be glad to exchange forever and to ask no more. Then, she feared. Now she knew that there were others, beside herself, upon whom Elijah depended. Farther, she could not go, for she could not see her own limitations.

At his office in Ysleta, Elijah found Helen Lonsdale bent over a map and oblivious to her surroundings. A pad and pencil were at her elbow. She was tracing the map with one finger which occasionally recurred to one point, while with the other hand she was apparently recording memoranda. Finally the maps were pushed aside and pad and pencil absorbed her entire attention. There were pauses

during which she looked at the map, ran over her figures and then her pencil flew over the pad more rapidly than before. At length she sat up straight, spread the slips of paper before her, and, rolling her pencil meditatively between her fingers, appeared absorbed in thought.

"You seem to be deeply interested." Elijah was standing at the door of the inner office.

Helen turned her head sharply.

"You're just in time to sign these letters before the mail closes."

Elijah seated himself at his desk and signed the letters, as one by one, she placed them before him.

"Do you want to look them over?" she asked.

"No, you never make mistakes."

She began reading and folding the letters.

"I think they are all right. You stamp them." She glanced at the clock. "You'll have to hurry."

Elijah stamped the letters as she tossed them to him. As the last stamp was affixed, she shuffled them together, and, with a glance over her shoulder at the clock, started through the door.

"Have the boy take them over." Elijah called out.

"Boy and hurry aren't on intimate terms." She was already on the threshold of the outer door. In a few moments she returned. "If I had sent the boy, the letters would have lain over until tomorrow, I was just in time." She drew a handkerchief

over her flushed face. The handkerchief was not purely ornamental, neither did it suggest unrefined utilitarianism. It lacked lace, but not delicacy. The motion that swept it over her face was decided, but not harsh. Her movements, as she seated herself at her desk and turned her face full toward Elijah, were quick, yet rhythmic and graceful. There was masculine alertness and concentration; yet both were softened by a femininity, unobtrusive but not to be ignored. For over six months, she had been "Helen" to him as he was "Elijah" to her. Yet the barrier between man and woman that seemed so frail, had effectively obstructed the path that led to intimacy.

Elijah was half-conscious of a longing which he could not express, half-conscious that every attempt to gratify it was repulsed by an intangible atmosphere which seemed transparent and unresisting, yet was dense and impenetrable. Had he been able to state his position to himself at this time, he would have shrunk from the picture. He was not analytical, therefore he did not know that the greater part of the sins of the world are the result not of deliberate premeditation and decision, but of the almost unconscious, initial yielding to apparently innocent impulses which should be recognized for what they are, for what they may be, and crushed out of existence at once.

Elijah was strong in his vision of possibilities,

strong in his purpose to wrest success from the teeth of defeat, strong in the enthusiasm that made him tingle with restless impatience to be doing, strong in his power to kindle others with the fire of his own purpose; yet he was weak. Weak because of an unconscious, yet all-pervading selfishness. Imperative as were his visions, even so were his desires, and unconsciously both centred in himself. As in the rock-ribbed, narrow confines of his New England home, so in the desolate, sun-burned deserts of California, unchecked by contact with his fellow men, his thoughts ran riot in the channels of his glowing soul. He had longed for sympathetic companionship; but his solitary, isolated life forbade it. This longing had found gratification in what he grew to believe was fellowship with God. His youth fostered the idea, his growing, solitary years developed it into a fanatical belief. If he was in doubt, he took refuge in prayer, not for guidance, firmly as he may have believed it, but for confirmation. From his youth up, he had had a fanatical belief in the guidance of Divinity, and had placed the Bible as a lamp to his feet. Elijah prayed to God for guidance in paths which he should have chosen for himself, blindly putting aside the fact that in the very seeking for guidance, he was longing to be confirmed in a course which in the depths of his soul he knew to be wrong. Fortified by his belief, armed by God's sanction, he

followed his desires mercilessly and without shame.

Helen Lonsdale was not analytical, she was not fanatical, nor was she deeply religious. Her surroundings had precluded that. She had strong common sense. When for lack of experience this failed her, she had intuition. She moved among men fearlessly, because in the field of their movements, sex was not thought of,—only things to be done. The two men with whom, in her present relations, her lot was so intimately cast, stood respectively on an entirely different footing. In their childhood days, she and Ralph Winston had been playmates. Later, they had been parted only to be thrown into closer relations by a strange turn of Fortune's wheel. She had welcomed Ralph with the unreserve of the days of their childhood. She was, perhaps, on this very account, unconscious that his memories were the more faithful of the two.

Elijah had come into her life, full-fledged, with no childish memories to blur the outlines of the image. However strong Winston was in the eyes of others, there were yet in her eyes the clinging shreds of the memory of other days. She was attracted by Elijah's enthusiasm, the strength of his ideas, of his purpose to succeed. With a woman's intuition she saw the barren stretch of his unsympathetic surroundings, and, with no idea of injustice, the sight prompted her to give in full that which had hitherto been denied him.

Her sympathy was aroused, her enthusiasm kindled by his work; but it was apparently impersonal. She was surrounded by an atmosphere of womanliness as delicate as an electric field, which warned off and repelled any disturbing element. Yet her atmosphere was polar; it would respond to the proper element. The element was existent, but as yet unrecognized.

Elijah again turned to Helen.

"How are things going?"

"Ralph is short of powder and cement at the dam. I sent up a pack-train this morning. It will leave two tons of powder at No. 1 tunnel. The magazine is getting low, but San Francisco is sending a carload. It will be here tomorrow. That will keep Ralph supplied for a month. Seymour writes from New York that Las Cruces is snapped at one-twenty; that he is going to run it up to one-thirty. Everything is coming our way on the run."

"We've got a pretty heavy balance to our credit." Elijah spoke meditatively. "Pretty heavy to carry in the local banks."

"That's just what I was going to speak of. I'd let San Francisco carry the bulk of our deposits. It's solid. The local banks may be called any time. You can leave just enough here to keep them good-natured."

"All right. We'll deposit our next checks in

'Frisco. What were you mulling over this morning?"

Helen laughed.

"How to get even with you and Ralph."

"Get even with us!" Elijah looked at her in surprise.

"Yes."

"What do you mean?"

"You wouldn't let me into Las Cruces on the ground floor, so I am planning a building of my own."

"That was Ralph's doing; he didn't want you to run the risk of losing."

"My five thousand was as good, so far as it went, as Seymour's hundred. He got in at fifty. He's made good at one hundred and forty. If you had let me in, I would have had twelve thousand five hundred now. It will take me a long time to earn that." She spoke with assumed levity.

Elijah was regarding her through half-closed eyes. He spoke very deliberately.

"You are right. I wanted to do it, but Ralph wouldn't consent. He meant all right," he added hastily. "I'll tell you what I'll do. I'll let you have five thousand dollars of my stock at fifty. That will set you straight."

"No it won't." There was no levity in Helen's voice.

"Why?" Elijah's eyes opened in surprise.

"Because that would be a present, and I don't want presents. What I get, I want to get myself."

"It wouldn't be a present. It would be a reward. You've earned it." Elijah spoke earnestly and warmly.

"From you, not from the company," she replied decidedly and with finality. "Besides, I've discovered a way to help myself. That's better."

"That brings us back to the first point. What were you mulling over?"

Helen drew the map toward them and weighted down the corners.

"Oranges don't mind a breath of cold air now and then; they're dead set against a freeze out." She was looking quizzically at Elijah. An expression of assured satisfaction came over her face at Elijah's astonishment.

His head was thrown back as he raised his eyes to Helen's face.

"What do you mean?"

"As if I needed to tell you." Her lips were scornful at the limitations Elijah had put upon her. A smile softened the scorn and left a doubt as to which emotion was dominant. "You know that oranges on a hillside with southwestern exposure will do better than in an unprotected river bottom."

Elijah looked up fiercely.

"Has Ralph been talking?"

"No; but you have."

"I never said anything of the kind to you."

"I'm not a phonograph."

"You've no right to make use of information that you get from a confidential position." Elijah's voice was decided. There was a startled look on his face that he could not keep from being anxious.

"Not even to make myself more useful?"

Elijah did not commit himself to words. His eyes were expectant. Helen continued, pointing to the map.

"This land is practically vacant. It's owned by a Mexican. He would jump at a dollar an acre. It is separated from this of yours by a hill. He would never dream of a tunnel. Some one else may. There are thousands of acres just as good as the land you control. What's the matter with forming a land company independent of the Las Cruces? My five thousand would cover five thousand acres. When water gets to it, say it's worth a hundred; that will make me five hundred thousand to the good. That's better than a present of Las Cruces at fifty, and it will come from myself."

"I never told you about the tunnel. How did you find it out?"

Helen could not restrain a satisfied smile.

"You didn't tell me about a belt of country around here where the temperature never falls to thirty-two?"

Elijah glanced hastily around the room.

"That's all right." Helen had noted the look. "We're all alone."

"What do you want?" Elijah's look was not yet wholly one of relief.

"To get a little closer."

"There's a big future in that idea. I have been thinking of forming a land company. We can get control of the whole section." He swept his hand over the map.

"We don't want the earth, Elijah. It would be too much work to handle it. There wouldn't be any time for fun. We only want a goodly portion. We want to do things, don't we?"

Elijah's eyes opened. An expression as of a revelation swept over his face. The simple "we" thrilled him through and through. Unconsciousness was dropping its mask and standing out in bold relief.

"We do, we do! and we will."

Helen was quite unconscious. She laughed at Elijah's enthusiasm.

"What kind of women have you lived with, I would like to know. This idea would not have surprised you if it had come from a man."

Helen spoke in ignorance. Unconsciously she had opened Elijah's eyes still wider. In a blinding flash, he saw Amy and Helen Lonsdale side by side. The vision brought him face to face with his past life with Amy; with its barren stretch, un-

watered by sympathetic appreciation, only parched and withered by the burning rays of selfish love. He had given; but he had not received. What he had accomplished, he had accomplished not only by himself, but in spite of a hostile influence. So long as his work had been limited to the little patch of ground irrigated by the developed springs of his home, Amy had offered no objections to his enthusiasm. So far as it was possible for her, she had been interested, almost encouraging. Even over his visions of greater things, which he had laid bebefore her unseeing eyes, she had smiled with acquiescence which he mistook for appreciation. Only when the films began to grow into material form, when the warp and woof must be gathered from others, and the frame of the loom itself must be builded with another's aid, did the real meaning of Elijah's dream suggest itself to Amy. Not that she saw clearly, only intuitively, that in the carrying out of his plans he would come in contact with others, that this contact would develop a comparison of herself with others, that this comparison would be unfavorable to her, and would end forever her ability to fill Elijah's mental vision. Therefore, at the very first signs of expansion, she had opposed the feeble barrier of her will. Elijah had no more recognized the barrier than he had Amy's limitations which made the barrier imperative to her. He had felt her opposition, and, without un-

derstanding it, he had chafed against it. He had not compared her with others, because up to this time he had not come in contact with those who made a comparison imperative.

Now the comparison was coming to him, had indeed already come. Appreciation, sympathy, energy, assistance were manifest to him in every word and action of Helen Lonsdale. Her first suggestion of independent action had startled, then brought to him a sudden, overpowering realization of what she was, of what she might be to him in comparison with Amy. His first emotion was fear lest she might leave him, and, equipped with the knowledge which she had gained from her confidential relation with the company, start out on an independent course of her own. There was almost a feeling of resentment against Amy, as if she had defrauded him, and this was a thing which Elijah should have put aside; but he did not.

Helen was watching him. There was decided humor in her eyes, in the motion of her lips.

"What are you mulling over?"

Elijah started as if waking from a dream. He spoke hastily, but none the less decidedly.

"We must drive over together and see that land as soon as possible.'

CHAPTER SEVEN

In spite of Elijah's earnest conviction that the land should be inspected and a course of action mapped out as soon as possible, it was several weeks before the trip could be arranged. To Elijah it seemed as if one insistent detail after another was crowding upon him in a most extraordinary manner. He grew fretful, and at the last decidedly irritable.

"Don't worry, Elijah," Helen said, after an unusually impatient outburst. "The world wasn't made in a day."

"Opportunities are, and are short-lived too."

"Not when they travel via Mexicanos. You can always count on one day more with them. Mañana has some redeeming features after all."

"Well," Elijah's lips straightened, "mañana is tomorrow, and tomorrow we start."

Helen glanced at her desk with its litter of correspondence.

"I guess we can manage it in some way."

"I don't guess, I know. It's tomorrow; so be ready early. Don't come to the office; I will call for you."

Elijah was as good as his word. At six o'clock he was waiting at Helen's door, and they were early on their way.

In the days that had followed their conversation relative to unpurchased lands, Helen had given much thought to the possible results of the plan suggested by Elijah. She had experienced no waver of hesitation over their present confidential relations. These presumed nothing more than their face value and were in no sense different from her relations with other employers. Had she been possessed of a fortune, the proposed partnership would have had a plausible excuse. She would then merely have furnished the money necessary to carry out their mutual plans and a partnership would naturally have followed. She had no fortune. Her relations with Elijah would of necessity become more confidential, more personal. Elijah was a married man, and intuitively she hesitated. But then; here was the great business opportunity of her life; the opportunity for which she had been waiting and hoping until hope had become all but expectation, and now hope and expectation needed only her consent to become reality. She had been really glad of the delays which put from her the necessity of immediate decision. She would decide when the time came. She thought of going to Winston again for advice; but Winston was occupied. This was her excuse to herself. In

her heart she knew what he would say and she did not wish to listen to his words. She dwelt long over the idea of buying land independently, for herself. But this savored of using for her own benefit, information gained indirectly from her present position. Moreover, being a woman, she shrank from wholly independent action. The appeal to her ambition was a powerful one. A great transformation was going on in California. It was so radical, so unthought of, that those connected with it in any of its phases were bound to become prominent, and prominence was one great thing that she desired. Elijah was the originator of orange growing on a large scale. He had made his particular field a variety of seedless orange which had been hitherto unknown; he had conceived of fertile lands that were now worthless; had, by sheer will power, got under way an irrigation scheme which would bring fame and fortune. These possibilities were known to only half a dozen individuals who could take advantage of them, and Helen was one. It was strange that, as she now faced the question finally, she felt none of that sense of triumph and satisfaction which she had imagined such an outlook would give her.

As she took her seat beside Elijah and was whirled through the sandy streets of Ysleta, out over the rolling desert toward the foot-hills of the San Bernardinos, she felt, instead of elation, a

strange depression which she could not explain away. Perhaps it was the chill which is always in the California air before the rising sun has asserted its power, or lost it when its daily course is run and it is sinking towards the western horizon. The scenes they passed only served to heighten this feeling; the torpid Mexicans, crawling from their cheerless adobe huts, squatted on what should be the sunny side, their sombreros pulled low, their ponchos wrapped closely around face, and neck, and shoulders, one grimy hand with numbed fingers, thrusting the inevitable cigarro between blue lips, as they watched with dull eyes the team flash by. Stiffened bunches of scrawny cattle rose regretfully from the sand which their bodies had warmed through the night. Shambling the least possible distance from the wagon trail, they stood with arched backs and low-hung heads, looking mild reproach at the disturbers of their dismal peace. Even the long, blue shadows stretched themselves stiffly along the yellow sands or lost their form in the soggy mists that hung damp and chill over the river bottoms and deep-sunk hollows, where seeping springs oozed out into the shivery air. Toward the west, the great Pacific was hidden by a waveless wall of milky white that flowed inland by imperceptible motions, overwhelming with its advancing flood, town and plain, but leaving here and there a

tawny hill rising above the choking mist, like barren islands in a sea of arctic white.

Elijah shivered.

"It doesn't look like a land of perpetual sunshine, does it?"

"No, and it doesn't feel like one either." Helen's teeth fairly chattered as she drew her wraps more closely about her.

"When we get ready to sell fruit ranches from our block of ground, we will entertain our Eastern purchasers with lateness. Late suppers, late retiring, late rising—"

"And late sales." Helen shrugged her shoulders. "We'll have to keep prospective purchasers under cover all of the time. If we take them out early, we'll freeze them, if late, we'll roast them, and almost any time they're liable to be blown away. Just look at that!" She nodded toward a grove of native orange trees. The outer row had had every leaf twisted from it by the constant winds.

Elijah glanced at his companion.

"I'll tell you my first move. I'm going to get you into a cheerful mood and then put you under cover and keep you there. What is the matter, anyway?"

Helen made no reply. Perhaps she could not, in exact truth. Her youthful philosophy had hardly gone far enough to emphasize the fact that nature

is only responsive to our moods, not creative of them.

"Twenty miles is a long drive on an empty stomach." Elijah spoke apologetically. I can go a week without eating, or sleeping either, if necessary. It came pretty near being necessary one time." He shrugged his shoulders. "Poor Amy! She never complained. Do you think you would have put up with a husband who gave you only oatmeal week in and week out, and not over much at that?"

"I might have put up with the husband, that would depend; but the oatmeal, never! If I had thought it worth while, I wouldn't have troubled him about that, even. I would have found something else for him and for myself too!"

Helen spoke with decision. Elijah's words were uppermost in her mind, a realization of what his work had cost him. Her enthusiasm kindled, she forgot for the moment that the suggestion of the more helpful course which she would have pursued, was an unqualified condemnation of Amy. It was partly owing to the singleness of the vision of youth, partly to the fact that Elijah's wife was hardly a tangible entity to her.

Elijah looked down at Helen. His face was sober. A moment he looked, then turned his eyes to the distant hills.

"I believe you would."

His look and manner of speaking disturbed Helen, though she could not tell why. All the doubts and fears of the past weeks again assailed her. She began to feel a vague distrust of her ambition. Was it after all so very different from the sordid motives she had despised in others? A vision of Ysleta rose before her, with the glaring rawness and gaudy pretensions which she had regarded with such humorous contempt. She had been keen enough to forecast the ruin in store for the promoters; but were her own plans so superior to these as she had once imagined? Did not they too possess some elements of ruin? Suppose success should crown her efforts, would success bring happiness? There was Elijah's wife; how would this success affect this woman whom she had never seen, of whose existence she was barely conscious? Her depression deepened. Why not tell Elijah, even without a plausible reason, that she had decided against it? Her lips half opened to speak, but a host of conflicting impulses held her dumb. Success, wealth, these were the golden spurs that had urged her on. Without this shining goal, what would life be but a dreary round of duties?

The sun was beating with fierce heat on her unprotected face. The clammy chill of the lowlands was gone. The towering heights of the San Bernardinos rose clear against the blue of the sky. Elijah drew rein, and Helen turned to look behind.

To the west and south as far as the eye could reach, stretched a great, softly moving sea of milky white. Thus far and no farther, soft fingers of creamy vapor reached out against the foothills, crept up into the gulches, reached upward and were dissolved by the sun into transparent air. Far up on one of the foothills, was a huge square of dark green set in a frame of tawny sand. Helen knew the map; she recognized the locality. She had no need of Elijah's words as he pointed with his whip.

"There's the first grove of navel oranges ever raised on this continent. I had just three trees to start with, now you can see for yourself. There's Pico's ranch. That's the one we are to buy." He again pointed with his whip, tracing the boundaries in the air. "There's the Sangre de Cristo; here's where it's going to be." He indicated with his whip the crest of the hills, the line of the main canal; showed where it would pierce a higher peak with tunnels, and where, the main canal being tapped, the life-giving waters would be distributed to every field.

"It is great." Elijah was speaking with solemn voice. "It was all revealed to me. The work is too great for me alone, I must have help. I shall have to give up to others, but not too much. They must not push me too hard. I shall be guided. But this shall be my work alone." He swept his whip again over the barren hillsides. "Yours and mine.

I shall need your help. I have never had human help before, nor human sympathy. What little help I have had, was because I could promise money, money! What is money beside this great work? Just think! I shall make this, all this a living green. 'The desert shall rejoice and blossom as the rose. It shall bloom abundantly and rejoice even with joy and singing.' " Elijah's eyes swept over the hills, his hands outstretched as if to gather to them the fruits of his vision.

"This is my especial work; yours and mine. I was going to do it all alone, but it was not to be. Why else did I trust you and why else did you see what I believed was for my eyes alone?" He bent his eyes full upon Helen. She looked shrinkingly into their solemn distance. The conviction was forcing itself upon her that she could of herself have nothing to say. There was more than fame, more than glory and wealth in the vision he was forcing her to see as he saw; something great to be done, a life to be lived too great to be measured by the petty standards of humanity, and thus beyond her power to gauge; something above her, beyond her, yet enveloping her like the air she breathed.

He laid his hand on hers, not questioningly, but masterfully, and without power to resist, she felt his clasp tighten. She heard his voice; words that

hummed and throbbed, lulling her to a numb insensibility to all but the thoughts she felt, rather than heard. She saw the visions he saw, heard the voice that he heard, and she followed, not him, but the vision and the voice. She shrank without motion; but she knew that she must follow. Sorrow was nothing, regret was nothing; only the vision that beckoned, the voice that called, these were everything. She would have given worlds to have been beyond their spell; but the eyes that were looking into hers she could not turn away from, the clasp of the hand that held her, she could not shake off. Her eyelids drooped, but they could not shut from her sight the great, solemn eyes that balanced and swung, grew large and small, but ever burned and burrowed into her soul.

Elijah gathered up the reins and the horses moved on. They followed the winding trail down the hill, up the gulch, then a quick turn and the dark green square cut off the burning rays of the sun.

In front of a little cottage almost hidden by blossoming roses the team came to a halt. Elijah sprang from the wagon, and Helen caught a glimpse of a delicately beautiful face among the roses. The next instant it was hidden from sight upon Elijah's shoulder. Helen could not believe the voice to be the same that she had just heard.

"Hello, Amy! I've brought you a visitor. Have you got anything to eat? We're awfully hungry. Driven from Ysleta since six o'clock."

CHAPTER EIGHT

In response to the brusque introduction that followed, Amy turned her eyes to Helen. The motion was evidently without volition on her part, only obedience to an unexpressed command. She advanced timidly, with outstretched hand.

"I am glad to see you; I have heard my husband speak of you very often."

There was a touch of the pride of possession in the words, "My husband," but it sounded pleading and doubtful, rather than confident. With the words, the eyes again sought Elijah.

Helen was outwardly self possessed, inwardly, her thoughts were confused.

"He speaks *to* me quite often; I didn't know that he spoke of me."

Elijah was sizzling with impatience.

"This doesn't look much like breakfast." Without even a glance at Amy, he turned toward the cottage. His words seemed to crowd each other, as he called back through the door, "You two stay and talk women stuff. I'll rustle breakfast."

Helen turned to Amy.

"That's considerate, if not complimentary."

"Elijah has no time for compliments; he's too busy." Amy spoke rather stiffly. She longed with all her heart to follow Elijah; but at the same time, she was glad of the opportunity to show Helen that she had talents along other lines than "women stuff."

Helen laughed.

" 'Women stuff' isn't so bad as it's painted."

"Why?" Amy inquired blankly.

"Oh, it fills in. One can't always be so terribly in earnest."

"Elijah is."

Helen restrained herself with difficulty. She felt an hysterical and unreasonable desire to laugh.

"That's why I'm in his office, probably. I'm a relief."

Helen's reply was reassuring to Amy. It was a new reason for the relations between Elijah and Helen. She accepted it without question.

"I'm afraid that I am too much interested in his work. It isn't good for him, but I can't help it. I think you are right about his being too much in earnest." Amy spoke laboriously; she evidently had some ulterior purpose in view, more evident to Helen than she knew. With all the guile that she could muster, Amy looked at Helen. "What is your work?"

Helen did not feel the pathos of what was pass-

ing before her eyes, she only saw the absurdity of it.

"Oh, nothing much. I just keep the books. That's easy. Then I write letters, and see that they are mailed, and for amusement, I have arguments with Ralph Winston; he's the engineer, you know."

"Yes, I know Mr. Winston. I don't think much of him. He's rather conceited, don't you think so?"

"Very."

"I am sure he is. My husband knows more about orange trees, and land, and irrigation than anybody, and yet I have heard Mr. Winston contradict him time and time again. My husband is very patient with him."

Again Helen felt an almost uncontrollable impulse to laughter.

"Ralph tries everyone's patience when he doesn't agree with them."

Amy felt that she was wandering from her purpose. She had a vague idea of returning to it by a graceful transition, but one did not suggest itself to her, and she dared temporize no further.

"Is book-keeping so very hard?" she asked.

"Not at all; it's just a little puzzling once in a while."

"Where did you learn?"

"At a business college. I took a regular course."

"I can't—that is—I—" Amy stumbled, her face flushed with confusion. She had almost disclosed her purpose in so many words. "Really," she continued, regaining her mental foothold, "I know nothing about such things. Do you really have to go to college to learn book-keeping?"

"No, indeed." Helen was moved to pity. "Get 'A and B's elements,' any book store has them; a little paper and pencil, a small journal, a cash book and ledger. A little practice, and the thing is done."

Helen's face was smiling and imperturbable. A glance at it convinced Amy that her purpose was undivined.

"Thank you. I have always been curious about such things." Then she grew oblivious of Helen, more completely absorbed than she had ever been before in her life. Her face flushed a delicate pink with the glow of the resolution which had at last taken definite shape in her mind. It was all so simple. Why hadn't she thought of it before? Helen was watching her with a pitying smile on her lips, but the pity was for Elijah, not for Amy. She recalled involuntarily her first meeting with Elijah, the intangible something that had puzzled her about him. Then the incidents of the morning came to her with a rush that overpowered her. She saw everything now, and the smile died from her lips. "What might he not have accomplished, had he mar-

ried a different sort of a woman?—if,''—her face was scarlet now.

''Breakfast!'' Elijah stood in the door, flourishing a dauby spoon. ''Oatmeal!'' he called, looking at Helen. ''Come!''

He darted forward, flung one arm with the spoon attached around Amy's waist and swept her towards the open door.

Helen followed, laughing. The laugh was not the hearty, spontaneous expression of innocent mirth, of—was it only hours, or was it ages ago? Helen could not answer. She was not clearly conscious of the question. She was not certain whether the present was a reality, or whether it was a vague, disagreeable dream, threatening hideous things that were nameless and terrifying, as the demon-peopled shadows surrounding a shrinking child. Her eager anticipations, the sudden, indefinite repugnance to the ride with Elijah, the chill morning, the huddled numbness of the blanketed Mexicans, the hunched-up cattle by the roadside, the clammy, milky fog, the fierce blast of the smiting sun, the land of promise in the blazing light, Elijah's ''My work, mine and yours,'' the consuming enthusiasm of Elijah, the empty, inane beauty of Amy, these two people, twain and one flesh, and she, apart or a part; which should it be? Weaving out and in, confusing, tantalizing, and she, drifting and floating like an errant

leaf on these currents of destiny, going hither and thither, to find a resting place, where?

The sound of her own laughter mocked her. She was conscious that her smile was labored, that her spontaneous effort would be tears. This she was resisting. Everything seemed strange to her. Why? She could not answer.

The breakfast table was set on a verandah, shaded with climbing roses and honeysuckle in full bloom. Flecks of sunshine pierced the clustered leaves, but the fierceness of the sun was tempered to a soft glow by the matted vines. The fragrance of flowers perfumed the air, and light and perfume gave a heightened pleasure from consciousness of the conditions without. A dish of steaming oatmeal was before Elijah, a pitcher of thick cream and a bowl of powdered sugar. In the centre of the table was a plate of oranges, golden and fair.

Elijah motioned Helen to a seat on the opposite side of the table, and swung Amy into a chair by his side. His face was flushed, his motions quick and nervous. Helen dumbly wondered if he too were conscious of a struggle within himself, if his actions were forced, or if they were natural, and she were reading her own unrest into them.

Elijah selected from the dish the largest and fairest orange, if choice were possible. He poised it in the air for the fraction of a second. "Catch," he said, and tossed it into Helen's hands. Another

orange was dropped into Amy's lap. Selecting one for himself, he began to tear the acrid rind from the fruit and holding the stripped orange, looked at Helen with eyes momentarily half-closed.

"Let's eat and drink to our success." His eyes opened wide as he turned to Amy. "Here's food and drink, typical of all objects worth the struggle.

'The bud may have a bitter taste,
But sweet will be the flower.' "

Elijah rose as he spoke, holding in one hand the stripped orange, in the other the rind.

"This fruit is typical of life. It is fair to look upon. Its acrid rind burns the lips; the thoughtless cast it aside. Only those who can see beneath the bitter rind, the sweet, refreshing fruit, are worthy to taste of it. We have tasted the bitterness, little girl, let us refresh ourselves with the sweetness."

He raised the orange to his lips. Helen and Amy did the same. Helen was still conscious of the tense muscles shaping her lips in a smile.

"Oatmeal?" Elijah was filling a dish and looking at Helen. Her face flushed slightly.

"If you please."

Elijah laughed, and Amy gazed in mild wonder.

"It's our joke," he explained. "Miss Lonsdale said that she would have fed me with something better than oatmeal if she had been my wife."

To this, Amy made no reply. She was absorbed in her thoughts. Her fear of Helen was diminishing. In a way, she was enjoying her own cleverness. It was clever in her to have drawn from Helen the secret of her hold upon Elijah, without arousing any suspicions. "It's not so very hard, just a little puzzling once in a while." These words stood out so sharply and clearly. Amy's face clouded. She must not forget, and her memory was not good. "A little practice and the thing is done." This was clear. "A paper and pencil, a—" "What was it? Some kind of books." Her face grew more perplexed and clouded. "Oh! What if she should forget? It would never do to ask Helen again, Helen would suspect. She must remember." Her eyes grew dim with tears that were demanding to be shed. "Any book-seller has them." Her face cleared. She felt like shouting her triumph. She could go to any book-seller and he would tell her what she wanted to know.

"That's all." Elijah sprang from the table. He lifted Amy from her feet, caught her in his arms, kissed her and darted through the house and out into the drive-way.

"Hook up the horses, José! Move lively! We've got a long drive."

Helen and Amy were standing under a rose-covered trellis. Helen was sober, Amy was peaceful.

"Sorry to leave you so soon, little girl. We're

going out on business.'' The team pulled up beside them. ''We'll be home tonight.'' The words floated back through the crush of wheels on the gravel.

Amy watched them drive away. This time she held no Fate-dealing daisy in her hands; a full-blown rose was there instead. The flush of it was on her cheeks, its perfume in her nostrils as she cleared the table, and washing the dishes, put them away. She sang softly to herself, with her sewing in her lap, as she rocked gently to and fro through the long, hot day. In the shade of the rose and the honeysuckle, the tempered sunbeams fell on her hair, on her work, the sweet perfume of the air mingling with the perfume of her dreams.

It was almost six o'clock when Elijah and Helen returned. Following them closely was a dusty horseman. Without dismounting the horseman handed a note to Elijah. Elijah tore open the envelope, his face clouding as he read. He turned to Helen.

''You're right, as usual. The Pacific will close its doors tomorrow. We've got to get back to Ysleta tonight. The cashier tells me that we can get our money out if we're on hand early when the bank opens in the morning.'' Elijah turned to the stable man. ''Take out these horses and put in Chica and Lota. Hurry!'' He slipped his arm through Amy's. ''Too bad, little girl. Thought

we'd have an evening together. Let's go in and have a bite. José will be ready in fifteen minutes. Sixty miles is a long drive for one day; are you good for it?" He looked sharply at Helen.

"Of course I am." The answer was brusque. The day, for very good reasons, had not eased Helen's mind.

Amy stood bright-eyed and smiling, as Elijah kissed her goodbye. A fleeting wonder swept over Elijah's mind; but he had no time for riddles. Amy was still smiling as Elijah and Helen drove away. The setting sun rested a halo on her hair, shone softly in her triumphant eyes. A long time she stood looking towards the great ocean, then she turned to the cottage. "A pencil and paper, and a little practice and the thing is done."

CHAPTER NINE

The Rio Vista was the famous hostelry of Ysleta. With full appreciation of the truth of the old adage that the path to a man's heart leads through his stomach, the promoters of the Ysleta boom had built a gorgeous edifice and equipped it with a cuisine not equalled west of the Mississippi. It is true that their artistic palates were not so finely educated as were their gastronomic, but the glitter of plate glass windows and the constant warfare of hostile colors, affected not at all the delicate viands which were placed before the guests. Since her connection with the Las Cruces, Helen Lonsdale had made this palace her home

As she ascended the steps of the Rio Vista, after her return from the Berl ranch, Helen's attention was attracted to an old man who was seated near the head of the broad stone steps that led to the broader verandah. He seemed utterly out of harmony with his surroundings. His clothes were not shabby, but they were evidently worn more with an eye to the useful than to the ornamental. The heavy boots were wrinkled and worn, yet solid, and the blacking suggested a reluctant concession

to custom rather than to a sense of propriety. His trousers were baggy and his coat hung in loose folds from a pair of broad, square shoulders. A white shirt was topped by a high old-fashioned collar, held by a flowing tie of navy blue. These incongruities, in sharp contrast to the finished specimens of well-groomed humanity who circled around him, first attracted Helen. It was the face that compelled from her more than a passing notice.

As she looked at the face, more especially the eyes, a sense of relief from oppression, an almost irresistible impulse to laughter came over her. It was not ridicule, but a light-hearted response to the contagious humor radiating from every line and wrinkle. Yet the weathered face, with its closely-cropped fringe of gray beard, resting like a sphere on the sharp lips of the high collar, carried the conviction that the mobile lines could set hard as frozen metal, that the humorous eyes, deep beneath overhanging brows, could pierce like sharpened steel. Perhaps it was her imagination, but the eyes seemed to answer her own and the face to turn as as she passed, in order to prolong the interchange of wordless messages.

Later in the day Helen was seated apart from the crowd in the rotunda. She wanted to get away from herself but there was no desire to seek companionship. Consequently she was annoyed at the sound of footsteps which evidently had her for an

object. She was more annoyed when a chair was dragged from its position and thrust beside her own. She did not even turn her head when she heard a slump in the chair which testified that the intruder intended to maintain his position. With no preliminary cough, a rugged voice remarked:

"Pretty considerable goin' on in these parts, if 'tis three thousand miles from nowhere, an' a hard road at that."

Helen's annoyance vanished. She turned brightly to the old man.

"Please excuse me. I didn't know who it was till you spoke."

"If you know now, you've got the advantage 'o me, in one sense. I'm Uncle Sid Harwood, retired sea captain, at present cruisin' for pleasure."

Helen bowed with sedate humor.

"I'm Helen Lonsdale and nothing in particular."

Uncle Sid Harwood surveyed his companion leisurely.

"First time I ever found nothin' in particular worth while. You come from around here?"

"Yes, I'm Californian, born and bred."

"Glad to know it. I've been lyin' at anchor here some days lookin' for a pilot. I reckoned you knew the harbor. Met a young fellow by the name o' Berl?"

"Elijah Berl?" Helen asked in surprise.

"That's him."

"Why yes, of course I have. He's president of the Las Cruces Irrigation Company."

"Praisin' the Lord an' callyhootin' around like a sky rocket with its tail a-fire?" pursued Uncle Sid.

Helen laughed at the apt though rather superficial analogy.

"Yes, but he's not all fire and fizz after all. He is doing things worth while."

"Don't doubt it." Uncle Sid spoke with conviction. "He always carried high steam, an' I guessed he'd do something, if he got hitched to an engine that would stand the pressure."

"Wouldn't you like to see him? He's in the hotel now, I think. I'll send for him."

Uncle Sid made no objections and Helen beckoned a waiter.

"Please see if Mr. Berl is in his room and tell him he's wanted."

"Eunice an' I thought maybe we'd see 'Lige. That's one reason why we came here instead o' somewhere's else. Eunice's my sister," Uncle Sid added.

Before Helen had time to reply, she heard the quick beat of Elijah's feet on the floor.

"That's him," Uncle Sid remarked, as he rose to his feet.

The footsteps halted and Helen saw Elijah stand-

ing in mute surprise before the old man. The next instant he had Uncle Sid's outstretched hand in both his own with crushing grasp.

"Well! well! Uncle Sid! You're looking as natural as life."

Uncle Sid winced.

"I'm feelin' as natural's life too, just this very minute. Cast off, 'Lige! I brought my rheumatiz with me."

Elijah turned to Helen.

"How under the sun did you come to know Uncle Sid?"

"She don't know me. We're just gettin' acquainted."

"Uncle Sid is worth knowing, Helen, I can vouch for that." Elijah surveyed Uncle Sid with a beaming face. "Where's your sister, Mrs. MacGregor; why didn't you bring her with you?"

"I did. She'll be down in a minute. Sit down. How do you make it out here, 'Lige? You used to be great on temperance back East, but I haven't seen any water worth drinkin' out here."

"There's plenty of water, all right, and good water too. We'll show him, won't we, Helen?"

"I'll believe that when I see it. Lucky thing the Lord didn't start in makin' man in this section," growled Uncle Sid, "he wouldn't have had water enough to have pasted him together with. He'd a had dust enough, goodness knows. I want a hand-

bellus, to blow off some o' this dust. Just as sure as I touch water I shan't be nothin' but a mud puddle."

"You can afford to even up, Uncle Sid. You've had more than your share of water all your life. A little soil won't hurt you now."

"Huh!" Uncle Sid grunted. "I was on top of the water then, an' I kept there. This dirt gets on top o' me an' inside me an' everywhere it ain't no business to be. Here's Eunice now. Look here, Eunice, here's an old friend o' yours, and here's Miss Lonsdale, a new friend o' mine, and I won't swap either."

A tall woman, deliberate in all her motions, advanced upon the little party. Her eyes rested for a moment upon Elijah as he rose with extended hand, then, acknowledging the introduction to Helen, they slipped from Elijah and glanced slowly over Helen from her boots to the coils of dark hair that crowned her head. Helen experienced a creeping sensation. The touch of the deliberate eyes reminded her of the inquisitive fingers of a jockey feeling for blemishes on the smooth limbs of a horse.

Mrs. MacGregor seated herself with studied elegance.

"It occurs to me, Sidney, that Miss Lonsdale may object to your rather broad claims to her friendship upon so short an acquaintance."

"I guess she's able to let me know her own mind. We took to each other like ducks to a patch o' wild rice. I'm too old to be dangerous an' young enough to know what's good for me."

Mrs. MacGregor ignored her brother's remark. She turned to Elijah.

"How does the change from sedate New England to this new life affect you, Elijah?"

"Not at all, personally, Mrs. MacGregor. I'm just the same 'Lige you used to know."

Uncle Sid broke in.

"Perhaps not your innards, but your outards ain't the same. You ain't goin' around here barefoot, with two kinds o' cloth in your pants."

Mrs. MacGregor's eyes were wandering from Helen to Elijah. She was comparing the evidences of sight gathered from personal inspection, with those of hearsay, the result of her indirect inquiries among the hotel guests, as to Elijah's standing in Ysleta. At length she arose, holding out her hand to Elijah.

"I shall hope to renew our old acquaintance. It is a great pleasure to find one's estimates of an old friend more than exceeded."

Elijah took Mrs. MacGregor's hand. In spite of his bewilderment over their implied intimacy in the past, he felt a glow of pride that she felt it worth her while to expand the mustard seed of their

former acquaintance into a luxuriant growth. He gave the limp hand a warm pressure.

"Let me do anything I can for your pleasure, Mrs. MacGregor. I am always at your service."

Mrs. MacGregor bowed formally to Helen.

"We shall meet again, I hope. You are stopping here?"

"Yes." Helen could hardly bring herself to this curt response. She felt more like slapping.

It did not escape Mrs. MacGregor, who was following Uncle Sid from the room, that Helen had begun to move as well, and that she was checked by an almost imperceptible gesture from Elijah.

"What about tomorrow, Helen?" he asked.

"You mean the Pacific bank?"

"Yes. It's not our secret now. Every one knows that the run will begin when the bank opens."

"There's only one thing to be done. You must be the first in line."

Elijah took a few quick turns then came to a sudden halt before Helen.

"That's impossible. The line's a mile long now." He laughed uneasily over the exaggeration.

"Then we are out of it, after all."

Elijah hesitated.

"Not necessarily."

Helen leaped to the point of Elijah's meaning.

"You can't do that. You mustn't!"

"Why not? It's our money."

"You know why not." Helen spoke sharply.

"Mellin has fixed it all up." Elijah insisted.

"You know what that means, as well as I do." Helen's voice was sharper and more decided.

Elijah was again striding up and down. He looked at his watch, then snapped it shut and thrust it into his pocket.

"Well, goodnight, Helen, I'll think it over."

"Don't do it. It's dangerous to think about some things."

Helen was alone, walking thoughtfully to her room. Her old mood had returned with even darker shadows. Why couldn't she act on her own keen suggestion and stop thinking about dangerous things? This question occurred to her. Another point suggested itself. Mellin was reading clearly in Elijah that about which she had only vague presentiments.

CHAPTER TEN

The first brick in Ysleta's speculative row had toppled against its fellow and the whole line was threatened with collapse. Some worthless speculator had begun it by trying to "cash in." The news had spread like wild-fire that the Pacific was to be the first point of attack. There was no time for aid to reach it from the San Francisco banks, even had they been disposed to tender assistance. As for the local banks, they were too busy furling their own sails for the coming storm, to think of going to the rescue of the storm's first victim.

Early as was the hour, the sharp-lined figures of the depositors jammed against the closed doors of the bank and faded to dim shadows at the far end of the line. Men, who a few hours before had bowed with deference to their fellow men, were now like savage tigers, holding their places with tooth and claw bared for immediate and merciless action. Woe to the luckless one who in the jam, was crowded from his position. There was no hope for him but in the far distance where men were shadows. No word was spoken. There was no

need of words where moonlight gleamed coldly on shining steel. A hand to hand fight meant the end of the line for the defender as well as the one who attacked.

Only one thing could have broken the solid ranks. Could any one in that fierce array of self-seekers have seen a man slink from a half-opened window in the rear of the bank, creep from shadow to shadow in the direction of the Rio Vista, and finally disappear within a secluded arbor, a timid fox in a pack of ravening hounds would have had a better chance of life than he.

Pale as the moonlight that lay soft and white about him, Elijah stood, awaiting Mellin.

"I have decided that I cannot take the money."

"What the devil are you here for then?"

"To tell that I will take chances with the rest."

"The devil you will." Mellin's voice showed the contemptuous scorn he felt; but Elijah's course was not new to him. His experience in life had taught him that in business the saint and the sinner stand on the same plane. He had noted that the sinner did without a qualm that which the saint did with moaning and tears. The result was the same in either case.

"I suppose you know that we are carrying five hundred thousand in deposits. We have one hundred thousand with which to meet the run."

"But the receivership that will follow?"

Mellin laughed.

"You are not so innocent as all that. You know our line of business. Real estate loans!" Mellin indulged in a sarcastic smile. "Two millions hard cash and five millions of Ysleta lots that aren't worth record."

"We took our chances with the other depositors and we will stay with them." Elijah's words were firm, but his voice gave them the lie.

Mellin was very patient. It never occurred to Elijah to ask why. Mellin was worldly wise; Elijah was not. Therefore Elijah never asked the question, "What does the other man want me to do for him when he is so anxious to do something for me?"

Mellin was worldly wise. He had read Elijah aright. Elijah was open to conviction as to what was right and what was wrong. His well-known professions only strengthened Mellin in his belief that Elijah relied upon others for guidance more than upon himself. So he made answer:

"You are not on the same footing as the other depositors. I am cashier. Yesterday morning I got a tip that there would be a run on the bank and I passed it on to you. It's no one's business that you had a friend on the inside. You were out of town and I sent a messenger after you. After sending him, things thickened. I saw that you wouldn't get back in time, so I drew for you.

Here's the stuff.'' Mellin held out a compact bundle carefully wrapped and tied. Elijah's hand closed upon it. He moistened his dry lips as the package rested in his hand and was transferred to his pocket. Without a word he turned toward the hotel. The parting of the ways was behind him and he was on the wrong path. The return was not irrevocably barred; but,—would he return?

CHAPTER ELEVEN

The shadows that had gathered around Elijah during the night were not dispelled with the dawn of the following day. On his way to the office, he was anticipating Helen's criticism of his act in taking the money from the bank in the face of her strong opposition. He found on arrival, that the devil had a way of his own in making smooth the path of his disciples, for a time at least.

Helen greeted him as usual.

"My last night's advice was unnecessary, wasn't it?"

"How so?"

"I went around by the bank this morning. It was a sight, I can tell you. I didn't see you in the line." There was an indirect question in Helen's eyes.

"I wasn't in line." Elijah could not restrain a sigh of relief as he spoke the half-truth.

"They say the line was begun before ten o'clock last night."

"I know it was, and it was kept too." Elijah turned to his desk and became absorbed in his work.

Whether or not Helen grasped the fact that her

indirect question of Elijah remained unanswered, she pursued it no farther.

Toward noon, Elijah went to the safe which stood in the back of the office. He opened the door, took from his pocket a bunch of keys and unlocked his private box. Helen's back was towards him. Without taking his eyes from her, he drew from his pocket a small package and slipped it beneath a pile of papers. Then he closed and locked the door and returned the keys to his pocket. He reseated himself, swinging his chair from his desk.

"Are you busy, Helen?"

"Not very."

"What do you think this business means?"

"What, the run on the Pacific?"

"Yes."

"It's the beginning of the end, and I'm glad it's come. Helen spoke with decision.

"The end of everything?"

"No; only a weeding out. It was bound to come, only I didn't think it would be so soon."

"I don't feel so sure that anything will be left."

"Things that are worth while, will be."

Elijah made no immediate reply. He could not get away from the thought of the thing that he had done; the thing that Helen had almost commanded him not to do. He knew what she would think could she know of the packet which he had stealthily slipped into his private box. He raised his eyes,

to meet Helen's looking frankly into his own, or—was it his imagination? Was there an anxious questioning, born of a half suspicion? He put the thought from him.

"Ysleta was worth while," he ventured.

"In itself, it was." Helen's face was firm with conviction. "But these scheming rascals have made it not worth while for a long time. There will be room for Ysleta if Las Cruces is managed right.

"It's going to be." Elijah spoke with no less conviction.

"Yes, it's going to be just so long as you keep clear of boomers' methods. Not one of the boomers has cared a snap of his fingers for Ysleta's future. Every one has wanted all he could get, now."

"Now?" Elijah repeated.

"Yes, now; but we have to *wait* for things that are worth while."

"Good Heavens, Helen! Haven't I waited?"

"Wait a little longer." Her voice was eager, almost pleading.

"About the Pico ranch?"

"Just that, Elijah." Helen made no attempt to restrain the sigh of relief that escaped her.

"I can't wait, Helen. You saw where that ditch line was going. Others will see it. You saw that only a hill lay between it and Pico's ranch. Others will see it. A tunnel suggested itself to you. It will suggest itself to others. We were the first to see

these things, why should we not take advantage of them?''

''But Seymour and Ralph, Elijah. It isn't fair to them.''

''I have given them enough.''

''Yes, but—''

Elijah interrupted her.

''I want to do things. You want to do things.'' He was striding back and forth across the floor of the office in growing excitement. ''I don't care for money. You don't care for money. Look!'' He laid his hand on her arm and pointed to the dusty street. '' 'Except the Lord build the house, they labor in vain that build it.' Because of this, it is falling! falling! But one can breathe the breath of life into these dry bones. It shall rise from its ashes. Deliver these lands from the hands of them who have wrought this,''—he flung his hand toward the street,—''from them and their kind, and Ysleta shall yet live. It shall look forth upon waters of plenty flowing from the mountains, upon green hillsides, and upon valleys standing out with fatness.'' He paused, his voice dropped almost to a whisper, but vibrating with intense emotion. ''The vision of the future came to me. I was alone and I waited. Then you came into my life. What I lack, you have; patience, sympathy. You don't know what it means to me.''

Helen's eyes were not frank and fearless now.

They were shrinking, questioning, doubting; but they could not drop from Elijah's. She felt rather than knew her feet were trembling on the brink, but she could not turn back. The old fascination was yet strong upon her, but she felt its strength as a whole. Of its elemental compounds she was ignorant; the religious fanaticism that with frenzied kisses wears smooth a block of worthless stone; the merciless vanity that comes to one who is fixed in the belief that he is God's elect; the human element that demands love, sympathy and unswerving devotion to the idols he worships, whatever the cost to others. These were strong elements and Helen felt their power even as Ralph and others had felt it. There was in Elijah an unshaken, unshakable belief in himself. His work appealed to others as it had appealed to Helen. Others selected with unclouded judgment the grains of Elijah's enthusiasm from the chaff of his fanaticism. Others had not a woman's heart; Helen had. She was not conscious of it, of how it was blinding her judgment, of where it was leading her. This consciousness was dimly suggesting itself to her, not from herself but from Elijah. Let him arouse that consciousness to active life, then she would know, then she would act!

Helen drew a deep, inspiring breath, looking up again. Her eyes were fiercely questioning.

No! This zealous passion that strode sure-footed

on the brink of destruction, could not be assumed, was not assumed. Helen was quick to judge and quick to decide when she saw clearly. She was clean of heart and pure of mind. She could not know that a human soul, lashed to frenzy by the stings of an outraged conscience, can yet clothe itself in robes that might be worn by an angel of light.

"Then I saw in my dream that there was a way to hell, even from the gates of heaven, as well as from the city of destruction."

CHAPTER TWELVE

Whether warned by intuition that one more step would be fatal, or whether his blinded sense of right was asserting itself, the fact remained that for several days, Elijah was hardly ever in the office and even then for only a brief time. He seemed to Helen, absorbed if not sullen. At first she noticed this with positive relief; later she had misgivings which grew more insistent as time went on. She saw and she could not see. She saw the dream of Elijah's solitary years daily taking shape and form. She saw that his work had roots which struck deep in solid, lasting worth; she saw Ysleta founded on drifting sand. The one had solid business principles; the other had glittering promises as worthless as fairy gold. Was this all? From here on, her vision was blurred. Was this principle which one had and the other had not, after all, rooted deep in the mysterious influence which guided Elijah's life?

It was with positive gratitude one morning that she heard Uncle Sid's ponderous knock on her door and his raucous voice calling to her.

"Come, Helen. Let's you and me take a walk before the sun has burned the dust all off o' the grass."

"All right, Uncle Sid! I'll be there in a moment."

She was up and dressed almost before the echo of Uncle Sid's voice had died away.

Uncle Sid eyed her approvingly as she stepped into the hall.

"Pretty trim lookin' craft," he remarked. "Don't take you long to get under way, either."

"Where are you going, Uncle Sid?"

"Anywhere, so I get out o' the smell o' varnish! Sand's better'n that." Uncle Sid wrinkled his nose in deep disgust. "You can blow sand off; but this stuff! It just soaks into you till you can taste it."

Helen laughed.

"It is penetrating."

"Penetratin'!" Uncle Sid snorted. "I should say it was. If starvin' cannibals just got one whiff of us they'd never think o' cookin' us unless they'd got used to lunchin' off pitch pine."

They passed through the office, startling a dozing clerk and porter to forced attention; but these, discovering that their services were not needed, settled themselves to their former positions.

The outside air was heavy with the indescribable

odor of newness and of hustling activity in drowsy repose.

Uncle Sid had a bag in his hand which bumped softly against the outer door as he opened it.

"Oranges," he explained. "Hope to Gracious they ain't infected. I gave 'em a good chance. I kept 'em in my room last night."

Outside the door, he gained his first knowledge of a California fog. The sticky, clammy chill penetrated their garments like water. Uncle Sid buttoned his sailor jacket as he descended the broad steps.

"This settles it!"

"Settles what?" Helen inquired, her teeth chattering.

"This 'ere fog has given me an idea. I'm goin' down to the river, the Christopher Sawyer, or some such heathen name. I just bet it's one of those uncanny sort o' streams that fit this country like a wet sail to a spar."

"You'll have to explain, Uncle Sid; I'm stupid this morning."

Uncle Sid looked sceptical, but resumed his point.

"Just look at this fog! I bet that the Christopher Sawyer gets out o' bed nights and distributes itself through the air general, an' waits for the sun to herd it back. I'm goin' down to see."

Helen followed the old gentleman, absently humoring him in his fancy. She was in a listening

mood rather than a talkative one, and Uncle Sid distracted her thoughts from her own perplexities.

"Gosh a'mighty!" Uncle Sid was out in the street, peering through the mist. "Seem's like wadin' through skim milk."

"Which way?" Helen paused beside him.

"I snum to Gracious if I know! I didn't adjust my compasses last night, an' I guess I'll have to sail by dead reckonin'. Every country that ever I was in before, an' I've been in most of 'em, the water ran down hill. Now here, what there is of it, don't seem to pay any attention to grades. When it comes to a hill, it just changes to gas, coagulates on the other side, an' goes on."

Uncle Sid was under way; Helen, absorbed in thought, followed absently in his wake. The palms which the industrious boomers had planted along the streets, loomed hazily through the fog ahead, gradually sharpened in outline, and again grew hazy with distance, as they passed them by. From each palm, a tuft of yellow-green spears stood up defiantly above a cluster of gray spikes pointing downward to their warty trunks; a picture of hope eternal in spite of inevitable death, as cheerfully suggestive of mortality, as the upward pointing hands, and the downward-drooping willows on the tombstones of New England's puritan dead.

Helen was wondering what possible pleasure there could be in this walk, but it was new and strange

to Uncle Sid and he ploughed steadily ahead. In spite of the dragging sand that made her feet feel like lead, the exercise did not stir her blood to a glow of warmth. The physical chill of the fog, the tawny sand that seemed to tinge the creeping mist, the mental chill of her mood affected her so that it suddenly seemed to her as if she could not take another step.

"Aren't you hunting needless trouble, Uncle Sid?" she suddenly cried, stopping short and looking at Uncle Sid. "Let's go back. We can be no end more miserable in our awful hotel with only half the trouble."

"I ain't seen no signs of the Christopher Sawyer yet, exceptin' this." Uncle Sid clove a semicircle through the mist with his outstretched arm.

"Oh, well, if it's a scientific voyage, Uncle Sid, let's go right on."

"Must be that. It's somethin', an' it ain't no pleasure excursion, that's sure!"

They plodded on. It seemed to Helen as if it were miles, she was certain it was hours. At last it grew lighter, and the yellow tawn of the sand appeared to have risen higher and higher, till the whole of the shrouding mist was a yellow haze.

"I can't go another step, Uncle Sid." Helen stopped short and sat down on a hummock of sand.

"What's the matter little girl? You seem sort o' done up this mornin'," Uncle Sid dropped beside

her with a sounding slump. "There! here I be! If I didn't ring, it ain't because I ain't hollow."

He unfolded a paper bag and drawing forth some formidable sandwiches passed one to Helen and began eating one himself. The sandwiches disposed of, he again investigated the bag. This time he brought out two large oranges.

"They do one thing shipshape in this country." He was eyeing Helen keenly while tearing the rind from his orange. "They do up water in mighty neat shape, but they do charge for it though. That's what they do!" he rattled on. "These yellow water-balls cost me five cents apiece, they did!" He parted the segments carefully, anxious lest a drop of the juice should be wasted. Again his eyes rested thoughtfully on Helen's somber face.

"What's the trouble, Helen?"

Helen's answer was accompanied by a blended look of assent to Uncle Sid's assumption and a humorous denial of it.

"One is often absent minded over troubles that can't be explained even to one's best friends."

"Well," Uncle Sid was not wholly satisfied, "perhaps by the time I'm your best friend, you'll be ready to tell me."

"I think that may be very soon," said Helen soberly, as she finished her orange.

"Have another?" Uncle Sid held out the bag cordially.

Helen was morally certain that Uncle Sid's New England thrift was dwelling on the five cents apiece; but she took the proffered orange. Uncle Sid rose clumsily to his feet.

"Now for the Christopher Sawyer."

The mist was rapidly clearing. Without visible means of locomotion, wisps of fog rose from the ground in the distance, trailed along like a sea-bird rising from the water, then melted in the air. They were standing on the edge of a mesa. Below them, tall cottonwoods rose in a straggling, sinuous line, their trunks matted with clinging vines, their branches loaded almost to the breaking point with clusters of parasitic plants. A line of shrubs, filling in between the trees, were bowed in a mat of tangled verdure that was dotted and sprinkled with rainbow colors. White-rimmed ditches appeared from behind projecting promontories of yellow sand, crawled under wire fences whose crooked, ghostly sticks, like the legs of some gigantic centipede, straggled around patches of wheat and barley. Outside these patches of green, adobe huts were surrounded by other scraggly sticks, driven into the ground and held upright by wires which were stretched out to them from occasional cottonwoods.

Back of them, Ysleta was lost to sight behind a rising grade of yellow sand, dotted by clumps of chaparral and cactus. Across the barranca, over

the tops of the highest cottonwoods, the rolling mesa stretched as barren and forbidding as that on which they were standing.

"I bet that's the Christopher Sawyer!" Uncle Sid was pointing to the tangled mass of vegetation. "These are the first things I've seen that look as if they'd had enough to drink."

Helen was looking in another direction.

"How queer those cattle are acting."

She was watching a bunch of cattle about three hundred yards away. They were clustered thickly, their heads pointed towards herself and Uncle Sid. In front of the herd, a huge bull was pawing the sand. There was a muffled bellowing and from beneath the nostrils of his low-hanging head, spurts of dust rose in the air.

"Those critters do look hostile, an' there ain't no fence to get over an' not a gosh-hanged tree to climb." Uncle Sid spoke uneasily.

Across the barranca, they caught sight of another cloud of dust, from which swung wildly gesticulating arms. At the same time, from one of the adobes, they saw a vaquero emerge. His arms too, were wildly waving. In response to his cries which they heard only faintly, two bunches of yapping gray fur swept across the white-rimmed ditches and rolled up the bank.

There was evidently an unwonted excitement of which Helen and Uncle Sid were an important

part. Then the cattle came to a conclusion and, with lowered heads and tails sticking upright, they charged straight for Uncle Sid and Helen.

The horsemen, meanwhile had crossed the barranca, and the next instant, horses and riders with the yapping fur, had turned the vigorously charging cattle to an equally vigorous retreat.

Winston sprang from his horse in front of Uncle Sid. His face was white with anger.

"Where did you come from?—" he began.

"From God's country, young man, and we got lost." Uncle Sid was unabashed. Winston's face broke into a smile; then he caught sight of Helen.

"You ought to know better than this, Helen."

"Better than what, young man?"

"Better than to go walking around here. You see these cattle are more than half wild. They don't often see a footman, and when they have calves, they are dangerous. If you had been mounted, you could have ridden through the bunch and they wouldn't have noticed you."

"Well; we shall have to walk back, apparently." Helen's smile was not wholly spontaneous.

"To God's country? It's a long way." Ralph was smiling at Helen's chagrin.

Helen laughed.

"Perhaps you could show us the way?"

"You would better go down to Pedro's ranch and

wait. Our supply wagons will be along shortly, and they will take you to town."

"Young man," Uncle Sid broke in, "you seem to know this country. Is that strip o' damp sand down there, the Christopher Sawyer?"

"The what?" For a moment, Ralph's face was blank astonishment, then he burst into a hearty laugh.

"Oh, the Sangre de Christo! Yes."

"They both mean the same thing. Whew! Helen, I've got another idea about this country. It's a great country for raisin' ideas, if it ain't good for anything else. It's prolific! It would make a stone man think." He paused, fanning himself vigorously. "There ain't any use talkin'; it's great! Soaks thinks full o' fog-water nights, an' then the sun comes out mornin's and boils 'em. If it wasn't for fogs 'twould roast 'em. I don't wonder 'Lige Berl gets a broad view o' Providence. You can get all sorts o' vittles in this country, roasted, boiled and dried. I bet those critters are carryin' around dried beef on their bones right now."

Ralph's look of amusement gave way to one of inquiry.

"Are you a friend of Elijah Berl?" he asked. "Helen, why don't you introduce us?"

But Uncle Sid again interrupted.

"Worse than that, young man, worse than that.

It's most as bad as blood relations. Me and 'Lige Berl's folks have been brought up in the same neighborhood back in New England for ages.

Ralph started to reply to Uncle Sid, but a glance at Helen changed his mind.

"Let's get down to Pedro's ranch, in the shade. The wagons won't be along for an hour yet." He tried to walk by Helen's side, but she waited for Uncle Sid.

The last remnant of the fog had departed; the sun was blazing fiercely. Toward Ysleta, the air was already shimmering over the sand. By the ditches and among the vines, was the music of many birds and the cheerful notes of Bob White.

Half stifled with the choking dust, they scuffled and slid down the steep trail that led to Pedro's adobe.

Pedro was following, his stolid face stifling his emotions. At the gate, the vaquero and Winston, drawing their reins over their ponies' heads, dropped them on the ground. Pedro stepped forward, swept his hat from his head and held the gate open for his guests to pass through. Following them, he pointed to an inviting hammock, swung between two fruit trees. Again he swept his hat from his head.

"Perhaps the señorita will honor my poor hammock by reposing in it."

Helen stepped to the hammock. Another graceful bow from Pedro.

"At your feet, señorita."

Uncle Sid, uninvited, explored the garden. Pedro was marching to the adobe. To Helen it seemed as if she had never before experienced such a delicious sensation as the resting of her tired body in the perfectly adjusted hammock. Ralph was watching her.

"Pedro has departed, may I take his place?" Assuming an affirmative answer, he stretched himself at her feet.

"Helen, what's wrong?" he asked anxiously.

"Nothing, that I know of." She replied evasively.

"Is it the office?" persisted Winston.

"Why can't you believe me?" There was a trace of annoyance in her manner.

"Because when your eyes tell me one thing and your lips another, I'm going to take my choice."

"I really don't like to ask you to attend to your own business, Ralph." There was a flash of the old humor in her voice.

"You oughtn't to say that to me, Helen, for the sake of old times—if for nothing more," he added deliberately.

Helen understood the conditional "if", as well as the expression of his eyes. A suggestion of red tinged the clear olive of her cheeks.

"This is no place for confidences, even if I had any to exchange?"

"Later on then." Ralph's lips were decided. "Who is your friend?" he added.

"Uncle Sid? He is an old friend of Elijah's. He and his sister are stopping at the Vista."

There sounded the leisurely chut-chut of the lumbering wagons. Ralph rose to his feet.

"There come the wagons."

At the wagon, Helen insisted upon riding in the driver's seat. Uncle Sid was stowed in the rear. Ralph flashed a look toward Helen.

"My horse won't lead," he declared. "You ride him in, Jim, and I'll drive."

If Ralph had counted upon a quiet talk with Helen during the ride to Ysleta, he was certainly disappointed. Uncle Sid's position in the background was the only thing in the rear which he accepted. In the matter of conversation, he was well to the front.

"What's 'Lige Berl doin' in this country anyway?" he questioned Ralph.

" 'Lige?" repeated Ralph. "Oh, he dreamed a dream; was five years at it. He dreamed of oranges, big fellows without seeds; of mountains with too much water and of deserts without enough. Then he dreamed of bunching the three together for their mutual benefit. He convinced some East-

ern capital that it was no dream after all. Now we are trying to make good."

Uncle Sid grunted.

"That's tolerably condensed."

Ralph laughed at Uncle Sid's disapproval.

"If you are really interested, you'd better let us show you around a little. You can see a good deal better than I can tell you."

Uncle Sid's face had lost its humorous wrinkles.

" 'Lige is really doin' something worth while out here, is he?"

"He's got me on the jump. That's a good deal in itself."

"What are you doin'?"

"Oh," Ralph laughed. "I'm being bossed.

Uncle Sid looked sharply at Ralph.

"If I was on the quarter deck as I used to be, an' saw you afore the mast, I'd think over my orders before I handed 'em to you. If 'Lige has any sense with his dreamin', he'll do the same."

"Helen's helping 'Lige to boss me. When he isn't around, she does it alone."

Uncle Sid looked at Helen. The humorous wrinkles returned to his face.

"What's the matter with you? You swallowed your tongue?"

"No; I'm holding it." She answered Uncle Sid's look as well as his words.

The lumbering wagon drew up in front of the

Rio Vista. Before Ralph could dispose of the reins, Helen was on the ground and ascending the steps of the hotel. At the top she paused, speaking to Ralph.

"I'm going to take Uncle Sid out to the works before long. " Then she entered the door.

Uncle Sid turned to Ralph.

"I don't guess you're bein' bossed quite so much as you say." He slowly clambered from the wagon and stood, looking at Ralph, his hand on the wheel. "I ain't askin' questions just for fun," he began.

Ralph interrupted.

"I won't answer your questions in fun either. But you do what Helen says. Come out to the works."

Perhaps it was because she had expected too much, but Helen was disappointed in the morning. Certain things had been disquieting. Ralph's words "For the sake of old times, if for nothing else"—had at first annoyed her. The annoyance changed to a questioning disquietude. The very annoyance suggested possibilities which had never distinctly occurred to her before. She did not, she could not resent it as she would like to do. She could not avoid a comparison between the clear, steady eyes of Ralph Winston and the glowing, shifting ones of Elijah Berl which had moved her so profoundly.

The contrast between the two men forced itself upon her. The convincing alertness of Ralph Winston, clear and cool and bracing, the glowing mystical enthusiasm of Elijah Berl that breathed upon her, laid hold upon her like languorous exhalations from a tropic growth. She recalled her childhood days with Ralph Winston. His masterful ways which flashed out in open revolt against her impetuous temper, that took her in his arms and in spite of her panting protests, soothed her into forgiving smiles. There was no yielding to her wrongs, no tyranny in his right, but a subtle stimulating air that suggested no personality, rather an impersonal force which compelled him, even as it did her.

There were tears in her eyes now. There was a great longing to go to Ralph as she had gone years ago, to hear again the words which had melted her darkness into clear light. An almost irresistible impulse came to her. "Why not go to him now?" He had opened the way. A word, a motion, a glance from her eyes and the way would open again. She rose to her feet and laid her hand upon the door.

Had Winston been in the hotel that night! But he was miles away and she returned to her seat. Her brain went on and on, twisting and turning the same old problem. Ralph knew Elijah Berl, yet he had cast in his lot with him. Ralph trusted in

his own strength, why should not she trust in hers? She drew a long, shuddering breath. Elijah had asked her for bread. Could she give him a stone?

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

Winston had been in earnest when he invited the old sea captain to make him a visit. He had felt as strongly attracted to the kindly old man as Uncle Sid had been to him. To a certain extent he was curious to know just why Eliah's affairs so deeply interested him. The chance remark of the old captain to the effect that he had known Elijah from childhood up, was a partial explanation that opened the door to the desire to know the cause in full. Evidently the youthful Elijah had displayed the same characteristics which maturer years had developed in California. Winston guessed that the weak spots in Elijah which had aroused his own opposition, had not escaped the eyes of the captain. As day after day passed by, he concluded that Uncle Sid was waiting for Helen and that Helen was too busy to accompany him.

Whether Uncle Sid had become tired of waiting for Helen or whether he decided that a proper time had elapsed since the invitation had been given, matters not. Late one afternoon, one of the supply wagons delivered him at Ralph's tent.

The flaps of the tent were open and Ralph was

there explaining some blue prints to one of his assistants. He looked up at the sound of the wagon.

"Oh, hello, Captain! I'm mighty glad to see you. I had about given you up."

"Huh!" the old man grunted. "That ain't over complimentary. From what I've heard, you ain't over quick at givin' up what is worth while."

"Give me a chance, Captain. You don't want to believe all that you hear."

"I don't. That's what I'm up here for."

"Now we're even on compliments. Let's call it quits."

Uncle Sid looked up shrewdly.

"Figures and doin' things ain't all that you're quick at." He paused, taking in the assistant. "Don't mind me. You go on stuffin' that young man. He ain't full yet."

"Just a minute; then I'm yours truly." Ralph devoted a few moments to the "young man" who, having been "stuffed", departed. "How would you like to take a little drive up the line?"

"Just how much is your little?"

"It's fifteen miles to the next camp. If you say so, we will drive up there and stay all night and the next day we can make the dam in the mountains. I think you'll like it, if it isn't too much." Ralph purposely touched up Uncle Sid with his last remark.

"I ain't too old to know when I've got enough

an' I ain't bashful at hollerin' about it, either. You just drive on till I holler, unless you get enough before."

Uncle Sid had little to say on the way, but his keen eyes were taking in everything along the line. Ralph's explanations were listened to in silence. Ralph was not slow to note the absorbed interest of his companion, nor the fact that not a word of his explanations was lost. At every gang of men, Ralph was halted by alert foremen, and often he left the team in charge of Uncle Sid while he went forth to untangle some snarled bit of work or to give farther directions in advancing it.

The sun was down when they drew up before the camp and surrendered the team to a waiting Mexican.

Uncle Sid glanced at Ralph with a look at once appreciative and cynical.

"The next time you tell me about a place, you just say how long it is, not how far."

"You'll have to excuse me there. You see I know distances, but I can't always say about the time."

Ralph was up the next morning even before the captain who believed in early rising.

"Good morning, Captain. Ready for another trip?"

"I guess so."

"I can tell distance and time all right today.

Do you see what you're up against?" Ralph pointed to the towering San Bernardinos. "It's horseback from here and we ought to be there by three o'clock anyway."

At the mouth of the cañon, Ralph explained the dam that was being built across the river and the heavy gates that were being put in.

"You see we let the water come from the reservoir as far as this, in its natural bed. If anything should happen along the canal we can shut off the water at this point first. Later, we could shut it off at the reservoir."

Uncle Sid asked a few questions, then they began to climb the steep mountains. They passed loaded pack-mules going up and empty trains coming down the trail. In places the trail was a narrow shelf along the face of a nearly perpendicular cliff. Below them ran the river in its narrow gorge, above them gleamed a slender strip of sky cut into ragged edges by towering cliffs. Just as the trail climbed to the edge of the cañon it seemed to end against a smooth wall of granite. A sharp turn to the left, and Uncle Sid could not repress an exclamation of awed delight at the scene before him. The trail led out upon a broad terrace. Two hundred feet below, a treeless valley wound out and in among rounded tree-clad domes of granite. Here and there, on either side, stately spires of naked rock

thrust up into the sky, the bare brown of their sides striped with bands of dazzling white.

The dam was to be situated between two granite bluffs at the head of the cañon. The masonry gate-houses were already the height of the proposed dam. The gates themselves were closed and the valley was a great lake. The sight was great, awe-inspiring yet peaceful.

"What do you think of it?"

"Who thought of this?" Uncle Sid glanced at Ralph with shrewd eyes.

"It thought itself." Ralph answered evasively. "We are really only doing here what nature herself did and then undid. You can see that this valley was once a great natural lake. The Sangre de Cristo cut through the cañon and drained the lake. Now we are putting in a dam and restoring it."

Uncle Sid did not take his eyes from Ralph's impassive face.

"Young man, there's a lot o' dust around here, but you can't blow it into my eyes, not that way. You can't do it by keepin' still either, any more than 'Lige Berl can by talkin' about it."

Ralph laughed quietly.

"Oh, well, that doesn't matter. We're going to get what we're after and that's the main thing. Let's go down to camp."

They rode down the winding trail that led from

the upper terrace. The remainder of the afternoon was spent in an inspection of the work. After supper, their pipes lighted, they sat looking out over the valley.

"Engineering is a great business," Uncle Sid observed meditatively.

"Yes," Ralph assented, "so is anything, if you push it."

"I guess not." Uncle Sid chuckled. "I ran away to sea when I was twelve years old. My education was got dancin' at a rope's end when the captain's mess didn't sit well on his stomach." Uncle Sid paused, again chuckled. "A rope's end makes a boy mighty observin.' "

"You didn't learn navigation that way did you?"

"No-o." Uncle Sid pulled meditatively at his pipe. "A rope's end is also mighty stimulatin' to the imagination. It struck me that I had got all I needed. At the same time, I saw old sailors with bald heads an' gray whiskers, still a dancin'. The only difference I could see between them an' the captain was that the captain could squint at the sun through a spyglass with a half moon hitched to it, an' tell the man at the wheel to hold the ship's head nor'-nor'east."

"Then what?"

"Then? Oh, I just got me a nautical almanac and learned to squint too. The first thing I knew I was

mate, then first officer an' by squintin' long enough I squinted myself on the quarter deck."

Ralph waited a moment, then spoke laughingly.

"I guess my rope's end wasn't so very different from yours, only I had mine in college."

"You didn't run away to college, did you?"

"No, I didn't; but I had a gad flying around my heels, just the same. After I got out of college, I was engaged as assistant to a famous hydraulic engineer. He sent me into the mountains to make a preliminary survey. There weren't many men as big as I was when I strapped a level and a transit to my mule's back and started off. I was going to show that old bomb-shell that he'd got a man worth having, and I wasn't going to stop with him either." Ralph paused to give way to a reminiscent chuckle.

"Well! I wish you could have seen those mountains as I saw them. Talk about taking the starch out of a man! Why, Captain, you could have wadded me up and drawn me through a finger ring like one of those Arabian Nights shawls. There were mountains and mountains, and gulches and gulches, precipices and cañons, and rushing, yelping torrents that I was to lead over them, or through them or around them, and the old man hadn't given me a suggestion that I could hang a guess on. The more I thought, the more scared I got. I put up a stiff front, or tried to before my

men, but all the time I imagined them laughing at me, or cursing me for making them wade that strip of ice water, or break their shins dragging a chain over the slippery rocks. I was thankful when the sun went down, but that didn't last long. Even in my sleep I saw those mountains jiggering and grinning. They moved into places that I had picked out for my line, and away from them when I had abandoned it. I stood it for a week, then I poured out my woes in a long letter to my chief and sent it out by a special messenger."

Ralph again paused. The old man waited for a moment.

"Well?" he asked.

"In a week my answer came. Just five sentences. 'You are going at your work the wrong way. You are asking it questions. By and by your work will ask you questions. Then you're getting on. Keep at it.' "

"And the line?" persisted Uncle Sid.

"Oh, the line? I made the profile and sent it in. My old man came up and looked it over. He was in a hurry as usual. 'You have laid out the line; now go ahead and build it', then he was off."

"You built it?"

"Yes, after a fashion. It helped to wash the gold out of the Yuba river sand till the anti-debris laws headed it off. Then I came down here."

"How did you happen to hit in with Elijah Berl?"

"He was the only man in Southern California who was doing anything that was worth while."

"Yes, it is worth while." Uncle Sid brought down his open hand upon his knee with a resounding slap. Then he laid his hand on Ralph's with emphasizing beats, looking earnestly into his face. "Don't you let go, either, or it won't be worth shucks."

Ralph returned the Captain's earnest look.

"I'll hang on," he answered briefly.

"That's right. You stick to it. You an' Helen Lonsdale are goin' to make this thing go, if it's a goin'."

"I think I appreciate what Helen is doing as well as what Elijah has done; she's the life of the whole business."

Uncle Sid appeared to take up Ralph's words. Then he changed his mind, speaking reminiscently.

"I've known 'Lige Berl ever since he was so high an' before." Uncle Sid measured Elijah's former height with his hand. "He's a queer mixture. He was always a mixture of ideas an' prayer meetin's an' the flesh pots of Egypt. You can't no more help commendin' his prayer-meetin' moods than you can help cussin' his lickin' the flesh pots. He ain't changed a bit out here. He'll just look at you with his eyes wide open an' you'll feel like

a man that's just got religion an' you won't suspect that he's picked your pocket till you put your hand in to pay your grocer's bill."

Ralph smiled grimly.

"There's not much profit in talking about this. But—well, you know 'Lige all right."

"Wait a minute, I ain't through." Uncle Sid's eyes were fixed on Ralph like a steel needle pointing to a magnet. "Money's the root of evil, but there's a power of good in the roots if they're used right. I've got quite a bunch of the roots handy. You're goin' to need them, an' young man, they're at your call when you say so, an' if I ain't mistaken, it won't be long either."

"Thank you." Ralph answered briefly. "I'll remember."

The Captain did not drop his eyes, but they softened.

"You've known Helen Lonsdale for a long time, haven't you?"

"Ever since she was a little girl."

"An' you're a friend of hers?"

"Yes." Ralph did not say how much more than a friend she was coming to be to him.

Uncle Sid felt the repellent air of Ralph's changed mood more than his rather curt reply, but he held doggedly to his point.

"Smallpox is a mighty mean disease an' you

don't always know that you're a catchin' it till it breaks out."

Ralph rose to his feet. Uncle Sid was breaking ground that he had thought about, but which he had not yet brought himself to touch.

"Helen has always been able to take care of herself and I don't think she will allow any one to suggest that she can't do it now."

Uncle Sid was on his feet too, his hand on Ralph's shoulder.

"Helen's a woman, Ralph. I don't know much about women, but I do know that a man like 'Lige Berl and a woman like Helen Lonsdale is a mighty dangerous mixture, an' the woman's bound to get the worst of it. Helen's goin' to need friends who'll stand by her, an' I guess when you think it over, you'll agree with me."

Ralph made no reply, but he did as the Captain had said he would do. He thought it over and the seed did not fall on stony or barren ground.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

The coming of Mrs. MacGregor was a turning point in Elijah's life. In the New England community where he had been born and reared, the family of Eunice MacGregor had stood first, and now in California, circumstances had already paved the way for the hold which she was to have upon him. Much as he had despised the boomers and their methods, as exemplified in the handling of Ysleta lots, when he came to dwell among the manipulators, familiarity with the men had modified and finally all but eliminated this feeling. In Ysleta, Elijah's scheme, for so it was regarded, was looked upon as a fairly shrewd move in the speculative field. When the Las Cruces Company was formed and work on the great Sangre de Cristo dam and canal was actually begun, they saw Elijah only as they saw themselves, a schemer after unearned money. In the end, Elijah came to be regarded as a smooth, shrewd man who possessed qualities worthy of a better cause.

The duties which had compelled Elijah to make his headquarters in Ysleta, had also compelled a more intimate association with the men of the town.

He was consulted as to their plans and indirectly encouraged in his own. He never for a moment dreamed that his surroundings were insidiously dangerous, or that his associates were infected with a moral dry rot, more to be feared than a running sore. These men were engaged in buying and selling. They bought with the expectation of selling for more than they gave. Ysleta was growing. He who bought today could sell tomorrow at a big advance, or the day after at a still greater. To be sure there were chances of failure, but nothing was certain. Were there not thousands and thousands of persons who preferred to take chances with the possibility of sudden and great profit? To put it at its worst, if fools had money which they were bound to get rid of, might not Ysleta furnish the opportunity as well as the next place? This was the dry rot which was infecting Elijah.

Day by day, almost hour by hour the possibilities of his scheme grew upon him. There were thousands upon thousands of acres of land, still barren and worthless, that needed only water to make them fertile as the gardens of the gods. There were other streams fed by the melting snows of the San Bernardinos, that rushed and roared among the mountains; only to be swallowed up by the dry sands of the desert in summer, or to tear a desolate and desolating path in the early spring. The idea of impounding the floods in the mountain recesses

was his own; if not strictly his own, then his own by right of first demonstration. These lands were valueless as they were. If he could only gain them, bring water to them, plant them with fruit trees, what might they not bring him? Honor above the highest, wealth beyond the greatest, would be his. He had made a beginning. The great Sangre de Cristo dam was almost a fact; only a few more cubic yards of stone and mortar, then the gates would be closed and the reservoir begin to fill. Even now ditches were being cut to lead water to his fields, thousands of trees were on his ranch ready to be transplanted.

He had made a beginning, but what a paltry one in the face of possibilities. There was the Pico ranch. Even that was not paid for. When paid for, how was it to be developed? The company had the water; he had the land. The land was worthless without the water. They could wait; he couldn't. He was president of the company; but he was powerless. He raged at the idea. A thought occurred to him and it grew in strength. The company owed its existence to him; in some way it should make acknowledgment. He needed money. He thought of the fifty thousand dollars in his private box in the company's vault. He had intended to deposit it in San Francisco, but one thing after another had prevented. Was it providential? The Pacific bank had failed. In their statements

fifty thousand dollars was unaccounted for. The company's pass-book was again in the office; but it did not show a balance within fifty thousand dollars. Mellin and himself were the only ones who knew why. The company owed more to him than he would ever receive, beside, he himself was a heavy stockholder, and he had a perfect right to do what he would with his own. Still, his way was not clear. Fifty thousand dollars was not enough. Without more, what he had was useless. He would wait. If he failed to raise the money, this would be a sign to him that his course was not approved.

Since his first meeting with Mrs. MacGregor and Uncle Sid, Elijah had sought out Mrs. MacGregor and she had artfully made this easy for him. In these interviews, she had skilfully drawn from him the story of his life in California, his present condition and his future hopes. She was daily convinced of her wisdom in seeking out Elijah. There yet remained the pleasing task of benefiting herself by her wisdom.

Mrs. MacGregor was an intellectual woman. She had not been born that way; she had deliberately achieved it. Nature had denied her personal charms. Her forehead was high and broad, and no amount of coaxing was sufficient to induce her straight, black hair to drape itself in a graceful suggestion of a Psychic brow. Being denied Psyche,

she boldly assumed Minerva and bent her energies toward living the part.

In her youth, women's colleges were not, and even if they had been, the straitened circumstances of the rural lawyer whose misfortune it was to be her father, would have denied her the privileges they offered. Having exhausted the fount of wisdom whose waters were curbed by the local female seminary, she turned on her father with the filial affection of youthful arachnids, who upon being hatched into life, suck their parent dry and then leave the useless skeleton and strike out into their individual careers. Under his tuition, she learned to translate Virgil, to construe Homer and to solve equations in a way that filled his harrowed soul with pride. She mastered the seductive syllogisms of Plato and Socrates, descended on Kant and gaining confidence, began on her own account to rattle the dry bones of scholastic philosophy till their rhythmic clatter suggested the wisdom that close attention denied.

Eunice mated with another aspiring soul. This other was a brilliant alumnus from one of the leading New England universities. He was poetic and soulful; but at the same time erratic and uncertain. These latter attributes were even more pronounced after the marriage than before. Eunice had deliberately cut him out from the bunch, to use the vaquero's expression, and, to continue the

figure, had adroitly roped him. The roping in had resulted very shortly in mutual disenthralment. The result was frequent and prolonged separations, on which occasion, each went his own way. Eunice, on her part, enjoyed a satisfaction which was ever present. She used the "Mrs." as a kind of letter of marque which enabled her to make piratical descents upon society in general in a manner which would not be tolerated in the more attractive but often compromising "Miss."

She sought the acquaintance of professors, judges and governors in her own country, and gilded titles in foreign lands.

It was in one of her earlier cruises in foreign waters that Mrs. MacGregor had captured her most valuable prize. In a secluded Swiss port, she had run across a wealthy widow whose husband had come thither in search of health and had unfortunately lost his life in a mountain climbing accident. Mrs. Telford was overawed by the irresistible armament of the designing Eunice and had surrendered unconditionally. Her health was feeble and on her deathbed she had entrusted her orphaned daughter as well as her daughter's fortune to the guardianship of Eunice MacGregor. This proved a most acceptable trust to Eunice. In the first place, it made her financially independent of her husband, and in the second place, it gave her the opportunity to exercise the talent in the

proper rearing and training of a child, which the Lord in his infinite wisdom has denied to mothers and has bestowed in such unstinted measure upon those to whom motherhood has been denied.

Her ward developed ideas with the years that came to her. She saw clearly the more glaring defects of Mrs. MacGregor's character, but never suspecting dishonesty, she left to her guardian the stewardship of her large fortune. She regarded it as an easy way of discharging a debt and enabling Mrs. MacGregor to receive as a stipend what she might hesitate to accept as a gift.

On her part, Mrs. MacGregor had taken full measure of her maturing ward. She knew that sooner or later, marriage was a certainty and that with marriage her stewardship would cease. She was, therefore, casting about her to make the most of her tenure of office. She had heard of Elijah's success in California and her heart was profoundly moved. She quickly became convinced that California was the opportunity for which she had so long and anxiously waited, and to California she accordingly betook herself accompanied, somewhat to her surprise, by Uncle Sid. Mrs. MacGregor was not wholly pleased with the idea of being accompanied by her nautical brother; but then—who of us is unhampered by undesirable relatives?

Mrs. MacGregor's veiled advances to Elijah were rapidly having the effect which her designing mind

had forecast; more and more he was coming to lean upon her; more and more he was coming to be guided by her.

Perhaps he was not conscious that an engagement to meet and talk over business matters with Mrs. MacGregor, was shaping his meditations with regard to the fifty thousand dollars concealed in his private box. Perhaps he was not conscious that he was proposing to do what he knew to be wrong and then, if things went against him, to say, as did our common ancestor, "The woman tempted me."

As he drove up to the Rio Vista on the day of his engagement with Mrs. MacGregor, Elijah was placid under his old refuge. In the progress of his day he would be guided. Unfortunately for Elijah, in the progress of her day, Mrs. MacGregor would guide. She was a human pirate, pure and simple. In her piratical cruises, she flew any pennon which policy dictated, while Elijah took refuge under letters of marque.

Mrs. MacGregor shrugged her shoulders gently as she took her place beside Elijah and threw a suggestive backward glance at the Rio Vista.

"I think it is wonderful that you have passed through such fires with no smell of smoke on your garments."

"If you could see what I have seen, it would not seem so wonderful."

"But I have seen, and it only increases my wonder. You might have accumulated safely in weeks what will take you years in the line you have chosen."

Elijah laughed. It was a gratified laugh.

"It isn't what I am after. These boomers are trying to give nothing the appearance of something. They began to build on nothing; I am laying a foundation. I may build the super-structure or I may not, that is for the Lord to say; but on my foundation the future of this part of California must be built."

"And where no blade of grass grew, you have made a paradise! Your modesty may call it accident, but I call it a design which has been given into hands willing and able to execute it."

Elijah looked thoughtful. Mrs. MacGregor's words were grateful to him, but they were wide of his purpose just now. He made up his mind to a bold plunge.

"It may be a design, but others now see not only the design, but its possibilities as well." Elijah hesitated for a moment, then resumed slowly. "It may be that I have blazed the way; it seems to me that I have. But here is my problem. Shall I rest content with having blazed the way, or shall I struggle with others for the rewards?"

Mrs. MacGregor did not hesitate.

"I have often thought of the parable of the

talents. I have thought of another bit of scripture that is not a parable. 'To him that hath shall be given, and from him that hath not shall be taken even that which he hath.' "

"You think then, that I have no right to rest on what I have done, or rather, that I ought to finish what I have undertaken?"

"Most assuredly."

Elijah felt solid ground beneath his feet. There was more than a touch of pride in his voice.

"Do you know that my every word is snapped up; my every action watched by those sharks?" he indicated Ysleta with his whip. "If I should point my whip to those hills to which I am pointing now, they would snap them up and organize an orange growing company." Elijah paused and turned his eyes to Mrs. MacGregor. She knew what he would say, but she preferred to let him speak.

"Well?"

"They would do by this as they have done by Ysleta."

Mrs. MacGregor laughed.

"Why don't you take them then?"

"Is it my duty? That is the question that is troubling me. I haven't the money to buy them even at their present rates. If I had, my way would be open."

"Why not have faith that the way will open in the future as it has in the past?"

Elijah drew himself together.

"I am going to tell you the whole thing, then you can judge me as you will." He told of the fifty thousand dollars, his disposition of it, the fact that the pass-book of the company showed a balance unpaid of fifty thousand dollars, his provisional deal with Pico. He hesitated as he closed the recital, then after a moment he concluded. "This deal with Pico must be decided at once. Has the way opened?"

Mrs. MacGregor had grasped every point. When Elijah ceased speaking her answer was ready.

"There are emergencies in life so fraught with grave possibilities that every law of man, I might almost say of God, must be thrust aside. Every one who does great things, must at times do doubtful ones. That is, they are doubtful to eyes unable to penetrate the future."

Elijah waited to make sure that Mrs. MacGregor had finished. She had purposely avoided a direct answer. This did not suit him. His eyes shone hard as steel through his half-closed lids.

"Am I justified in using that fifty thousand?"

Mrs. MacGregor's lips set.

"In my opinion you are."

Elijah's question had not surprised her; but she inwardly resented it. Her plan had been to deal

out generalities, leaving her own skirts free. She realized that he had gained all that he wanted from her and had given her nothing.

"There is another matter that has troubled me for a long time, Mrs. MacGregor. I have tried to shut my eyes to it, but I cannot. I can see great things to be done and I can help others to see, but there are times when I need help; when I long for human sympathy, intelligent sympathy that can see what I see, that can have faith in my work,—" he paused.

Mrs. MacGregor was watching him narrowly, every sense alert.

"The intelligent sympathy which a wife may give, but which Amy cannot?" It was a daring forecast. Mrs. MacGregor held her breath in spite of herself.

Elijah's face grew drawn and white. This was the first time that, either to himself or to another, he had stated the case baldly. Hitherto, even to himself, he had decently veiled his unholy thoughts. The appealing eyes of his wife were upon him, now that he was striving to turn his own away from them. He had not imagined that it would be so hard. Even the eyes of Helen Lonsdale could not comfort him. The thought of what he was clearing from the way, in order to look into them, appalled him.

Mrs. MacGregor prepared to sell the last remnant

of her soul to the devil. Upon Helen Lonsdale she had no hold. She had noted the girl's interest in Elijah, an interest of which the girl herself was unconscious. If now, she cleared Helen's path of obstructions, would not she win her gratitude? Slowly and deliberately, she spoke.

"You never loved Amy Eltharp. The woman whom you could love, who could return a love as deep and lasting as your own is separated from you. You are paying the penalty of your mistake. Amy is paying for it, even"—she paused, then went on without a quaver,—"even as Helen Lonsdale is paying for it."

Elijah was as one stricken. For a long time he remained silent. Mrs. MacGregor watched him narrowly. He was striving to do justice to himself and to his better nature, but the habit of years was strong upon him. He had strayed into a tempting path without definite thought as to where it would lead either himself or others. He had compared Helen Lonsdale with his wife; his life that might have been with Helen, with his life that was with Amy. Mrs. MacGregor's words had defined his position clearly and sharply. In innocence, he could go no farther. From now on, he must act decisively and with full knowledge of what his actions meant. At last he spoke, as one broken on a wheel.

"Don't torture me any longer. Tell me what you mean."

"I want to save you from yourself. You have made a mistake. You have had a loveless life. You married weakness where you needed strength. You married selfishness, where you needed unselfishness, devoted sympathy. You have fled to a common refuge; you have sought in a mistress all that you have lacked in a wife."

Elijah burst out furiously.

"Helen Lonsdale is not that! She is as pure as sunlight."

"You cannot make her your wife; she knows that as well as you do. You are walking in a path the end of which is certain."

Elijah made no immediate reply. His reason told him the end of Mrs. MacGregor's logic, but he weakly demanded that she should point the way.

"There is then only one thing to do?"

"On the contrary,"—Mrs. MacGregor spoke sharply, for she was losing patience,—"there are three courses open to you. You can go on as you are going and the end is ruin. Ruin to Helen, ruin to Amy, ruin to your work, ruin to yourself. You can break off your relations with Helen Lonsdale and go back to your old life; your life as it was before Helen entered it. Or—" She paused, as one who could go farther, but would not.

"What?" Elijah breathed the word rather than spoke it."

Mrs. MacGregor answered as one wearied with a hopeless burden.

"The laws of the world recognize the fact that the purest impulses of man are often mistaken. They recognize this fact and have provided a way of separation."

Elijah made no reply. They drove on in silence toward his ranch where Mrs. MacGregor was to spend a few days. His thought wandered from his surroundings back to the clear sunlight, the bracing air of his old New England home. There was peace there; the peace of simple lives untouched by the fierce passions of the throbbing world. He saw Amy Eltharp, flaxen-haired, blue-eyed, walking through the cool woods, her hand in his own, her eyes down-cast, her cheeks delicately flushed, as her trembling lips breathed "yes" in answer to his passionate words.

Now it was all gone. He was in a desert land, burned with conflicting emotions as fierce as the sun that beat upon the sands around him.

When they reached the ranch, Amy was standing in the rose-trellised drive-way to welcome them. Fair as the roses that surrounded her, she stood with anxious eyes raised to Elijah. Her purpose to make herself useful to Elijah, was yet strong within her. Perhaps this fact tempered for her the

chill of Elijah's absent-minded response to her greeting. She was feeding her heart on hope. "A little study, a little practice and the thing is done."

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

Amy Berl was demonstrating the world-old truth, that love, however selfish, ennobles and softens the life into which it enters. With feeble brain but loving heart, she was working out for herself the truth that love which feeds on sensuous beauty or sensuous passion alone, dies the death of the brute; that the love which is born not to die, must drink deeper and ever deeper with the passing years at the fountain of eternal youth; that to a love thus thirst-quenched, every gray hair that marks a day forever gone, every wrinkle on flesh shrivelling at the touch of time, eyes dimmed with the shedding of many tears, every footstep trembling with the passing of the weary milestones of life, are bonds which the fires of hell cannot melt, nor the peace of heaven dissolve away. Amy did not know it, she could not have grasped the fact had it been told her, that she was laying hold of the saving element of life, that animated as she had been by a love that was still seeking itself alone, she was yet nourishing a power that would raise her from the ashes of despair.

Amy had not forgotten the task she had set her-

self. She had obtained "A & B's Elements," and day after day, she was striving to master the simple problems that would enable her to take Helen Lonsdale's place in her husband's life. The coming of Mrs. MacGregor had not interfered with her purpose, nor with her hours of study. Through the day, Mrs. MacGregor and Elijah were absent, inspecting the desolate stretches of red hillsides, or the struggling green of seeping springs in deep arroyos.

Mrs. MacGregor's plans with Elijah were shaping to a desired end, but,—there was an uncertain element which she could not resolve. There was no lack of keen, exact penetration in Elijah; but there was now a reticence about his personal feelings which she did not dare openly to break. Indirect openings which she gave, he passed by without notice. She was unable to decide whether his reticence was due to wounded pride, in that he had been betrayed into an exhibition of the inner chambers of his heart, or whether it was due to a growing resentment of her attack upon Helen Lonsdale. Another surmise and nearer the truth, had she known it, was that he had been brought face to face with his position as regarded his wife. If Mrs. MacGregor had been sure of Elijah's ultimate decision, her course of action might have been different. As it was, she was fairly confident that she knew every element in Elijah, and that she

could predicate its logical end. She was certain that she knew Amy, and that sooner or later a separation would come, and that the sooner it came, the better it would be for her own personal designs.

Mrs. MacGregor soon reached another conclusion which she regarded as final. She had carefully studied Amy in every contact with Elijah. She saw in her every attitude before him, in her every word to him, an eager assurance of confidence and love which in reality was an evident doubt of it, or at least a fear for it. She was in effect, doing in her pitiful way, what she had always done, mirroring to her husband every phase of himself which he presented to her. It was inert, impersonal, and, in Elijah's present state of mind, not only passively, but actively exasperating to him. It wholly lacked the power to soothe, much less to inspire.

It was several days after Mrs. MacGregor had reached her conclusion that Amy was impossible, before she began an aggressive campaign against her.

Elijah had been called to Ysleta and had gone alone. Mrs. MacGregor had been invited to accompany him, but for personal reasons, had declined. Her ostensible reason was that he had kept her so busy that she had had no time in which to give herself up to the beauties of his place.

Poor innocent Amy! She and Mrs. MacGregor

were seated on the verandah. Through the trembling leaves, the tempered sunlight filtered and waltzed to and fro, in dreamy, peaceful measures across the floor. The songs of many birds, the flutter of their wings, the rustle of leaves, these soothed and lulled the senses to a restful peace. There is nothing like it in the world; nowhere but in California, newly awakened. The rank growth of fruit and flower, a growth roused from its fiery sleep, now striving in a day to make up for ages of helpless bondage.

Mrs. MacGregor was sitting with her hands folded in her lap, but her thoughts were busy. At last she spoke.

"Are you happy in California?"

Amy looked up in unfeigned surprise.

"Why shouldn't I be?"

A trained diplomat could not have parried the thrust more deftly. Mrs. MacGregor looked fixedly but calmly at Amy. Was that answer accidental or designed?

"Because," she spoke deliberately, "in California there is not a single thing to suggest your New England home."

"Except Elijah." Amy did not look up this time. She was taking her guest and her words as a matter of course.

"Haven't you noticed any change in Elijah?"

"No-o." Amy's voice faltered, for she was

truthful. She was wondering if it was wicked to tell this lie. It did not occur to her to resent the necessity for it.

"It would not be strange if he had changed. California has changed, is changing. Those who come here must change,—for better or for worse."

"Elijah could not change for worse."

Amy's meaning was plain, but Mrs. MacGregor smiled at her words.

"I knew Elijah as a boy and as a young man. Then our paths diverged for six years. They have come together again and I am astonished at the change. He was strong, but his strength had not found a worthy purpose. It has found it here."

Amy was beginning to take an active interest in the conversation.

"Yes, when we first came here, the people laughed at us. Now, Elijah has got more than ten thousand orange trees growing where no one thought of their growing. People are after him all the time now. He is going to bring water to thousands of acres of desert land."

Mrs. MacGregor listened impatiently to a recital of Elijah's labors, as dreary as Homer's catalogue of ships.

"Yes, I know. Elijah has told me something of this and I have seen more. His strength has found a purpose. He has done a great work; but it is only a beginning, a preparation for a greater."

Mrs. MacGregor began to launch forth into generalities. "At rare intervals in the progress of the world, great opportunities arise and only one man who is equal to the grasping and working out of the opportunity. Such a man, we call a genius. A genius transcends the limitations of his fellows and he also transcends their laws. It is his right; he cannot work without it. He must not be hindered or obstructed. At whatever cost of pain to those who are near and dear to him, his work must go on. It is for the good of unknown and unnumbered humanity; humanity is everything, individuals do not count. You doubtless have thought of all this; possibly have decided upon your course of action. The question is, are you ready to sacrifice yourself even, for the sake of Elijah's work?"

Amy caught eagerly at the last sentence of Mrs. MacGregor's words. The more eagerly, because they were the only words that had to her the slightest meaning.

"I *have* sacrificed myself and I have never complained once. Not even when we were traveling around from place to place in a covered wagon, and sleeping on the ground, and when we had only oatmeal to eat day in and day out; not even when our babies were sick and we had no money to pay a doctor. I was afraid they were going to die, but Elijah did not know; he was busy with his work. That was after we came here, and I never told

him.'' Amy did not look up, but Mrs. MacGregor was watching her. From under the veiling lids, she saw the tears gather, roll across the pink cheeks and fall on the work in her lap. Mrs. MacGregor did not know, perhaps Amy did not, whether the tears were for the past she was reciting, or for the future which she was fearing. Without looking up, she drew her hand across her eyes. ''I don't know why I am telling you all this. I have never told any one before; not even my mother.''

Unflinchingly Mrs. MacGregor turned to Amy.

''I have no doubt that you have done your duty so far as you have seen it; but here is the point. Are you willing to make further sacrifices, from your standpoint, the supreme sacrifice?''

Amy's mind had been overstrained in an effort to follow even the small part of Mrs. MacGregor's words that was at all intelligible to her; there was a suggestion of petulance in her reply.

''There is no need of any more sacrifice. Just see.'' She pointed through the roses to the dark green orange trees full of golden fruit which covered the hillside below them. ''Elijah has no need to do more. He has enough for us all now. Even if he should leave the Water Company, he would have enough. When that is done, he will come home to me and I shall have him all to myself; I and the children.''

''Elijah's work is only begun. What he has

done, is only a preparation for the work that is to be done, that he alone can do. Nothing must stand in his way, not even wife and children."

Amy answered passionately.

"He has done enough!"

Mrs. MacGregor's eyes were cold and merciless as those of a snake watching its victim. She thought long before speaking. She was conscious that there was danger in handling for one's own purposes a mind so feeble and hesitating as Amy's, but she must make the attempt. Should she rest content with having instilled the subtle poison in Amy's mind, leaving it to work slowly to a doubtful end? Could she be sure that it would do its work? On the other hand, to one of Amy's mental caliber, would the plain, brutal statement, stripped of ambiguity, be more than a suggestion? In this latter course there lay the danger that Amy would grasp the full import of her words and that in the mental agony that would surely follow, she would go to Elijah at once. Would she go to Elijah? Mrs. MacGregor felt sure that she would not. Weak as Amy was, she would intuitively feel the hopelessness of an appeal to him. Already she was vaguely conscious that her hold upon him was slight, how slight she would not dare to put to the test. She would not openly acknowledge this fear to herself, much less to others, least of all to Elijah. She had a fixed purpose in her mind, to fit herself to take

Helen's place and upon its success she had staked all. To abandon her secret efforts would leave her again wandering, wavering, to go over the whole weary ground again. Mrs. MacGregor made her decision. Her voice was modulated, almost sympathetic, but it was firm and decided.

"No, Amy, he has not done enough. You have not done enough. He must go on. He must give you up. You must give him up."

Amy sprang from her chair. Her work slipped from her lap and lay huddled at her feet. Slowly, painfully, the meaning of Mrs. MacGregor's words was boring into her brain. Her eyes were wide open, pitifully pleading, like the eyes of a shrinking victim in the clutch of a beast of prey. Then they changed to a look as hard and resolute as her eyes were capable of expressing.

"Give up Elijah? I'll never give up Elijah. Never! Never! Never!" Then she fled through the open door.

Mrs. MacGregor smiled complacently. "Never," was a long time. She had steered close to the line, but she felt that she had won. As it happened, chance aided her. Had Elijah been at home, in her first agony, Amy would doubtless have gone to him and have risked all in a frantic appeal. But Elijah was away and it was late before he returned. In her room, Amy sat with the dumb misery of a suffering animal. It did not occur to her to rise

up in righteous wrath against the brutal woman who had inflicted this torture upon her, much less against her husband. She was thinking of herself, of her happiness that had been, of the awful fear that was consuming her. Justice or injustice was far from her thoughts. In bitter desperation she clung to the feeble purpose that she had fashioned for her salvation. Gradually this purpose regained its hold upon her. She was wasting time and there was none to lose. Trembling in every nerve she hastened from her room, from *their* room, and with trembling fingers turned the pages of "A & B's Elements" and bent herself to her all but hopeless task. With quivering lips and hard, dry eyes she wrote and rewrote the problems of the book and strove to master them. She was unconscious of time, only that it was long and bitter. The magnitude of her task appalled her, the hopelessness of it overwhelmed her, she tried to hold herself to it; but in vain. With a wailing cry she buried her head in her arms and gave way to the tears that at last came to her relief.

It was late that night when Elijah returned. He gave his horses in charge of the sleepy Mexican and entered the house. He went directly to their room, but Amy was not there. The bed was undisturbed. Elijah passed quietly to the next room. It was Amy's own. A light softly glowing beneath the door-sill told him that the room was

occupied. He opened the door gently and stood stiffened, immovable, at the sight before him. Amy was seated at her little work-table. A shaded lamp threw its full light upon her head, resting upon her outstretched arms. Her face was turned toward him; the light showed lids, red and tear-stained. Near one outstretched hand was a pencil, fallen from the sleep-loosened fingers. There was a worn book lying open, surrounded by loose papers. Elijah moved softly toward the table. He picked up the book. It was "A & B's Elements." The tear-blotched papers were covered with figures. Elijah replaced the book and papers. Like a flash the whole explanation of the open book, and the figure-covered papers came to him. His eyes were upon the bowed head, upon the baby lips moving pathetically in their troubled sleep. His guardian angel was pleading hard within him. With wide-open, motionless eyes he bent forward, his hands outstretched, his foot lifted to take the step that would redeem him. Then his hands fell slowly to his side; he straightened and turned away abruptly. As softly as he had entered the room, so softly he left it.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

Elijah had no difficulty in securing options on the land which he and Mrs. MacGregor had selected. They had, however, underestimated the apathy of the Mexican owners, who, while perfectly willing to give options with no preliminary payments, were adamant as to the length of time to which the options should be extended.

Mrs. MacGregor smiled reassuringly upon Elijah when he had stated his difficulty.

"The time is ample. I have some means at my command."

Elijah asked no questions and she tendered no explanations. When, however, the time passed by and the deeds came to be actually transferred, his unasked questions were answered. Not a cent of the money, not a single negotiable paper which went into the preliminary payments, was in Eunice MacGregor's name, except that as by power of attorney, she had acted for her absent ward. Elijah, remembering his transactions with the Pacific bank, could say nothing.

Mrs. MacGregor had only one more obstacle to overcome. At first, as guardian, later as trusted

financial agent, with full power of attorney, she could manage her ward's fortune as she would; but at any time this power might be dissolved and she be called to a full accounting. This done, and it was a continual menace, Mrs. MacGregor would be in no position either to take or to demand a share in her ward's investments. She proposed to remain in this doubtful position just as short a time as possible. A deed to a property bought with her ward's money, would leave no scattering crumbs which she could gather for herself. With the deed made over to a company, the case would be different. Her ward's money would in this case, lose its identity. A ten per cent interest in a capitalization of two millions, could be balanced with two hundred thousand of its stock at par, and leave Elijah and Mrs. MacGregor to repay themselves for their efforts. This was earnestly talked over between the two. Elijah was not at all easy in his mind; but he could say nothing. He had tried; but he was no match for Mrs. MacGregor's polished logic.

Mrs. MacGregor not only made no objections to including Helen Lonsdale in their arrangements, but had on the contrary, kept her interests a prominent figure in their transactions. She had no question but that in this way she would bind Helen closely to herself.

"Look at the facts squarely," said Mrs. MacGregor to Elijah. "Your supply of water is almost

here. There is only a small hill between the main canal of the Las Cruces and us. A few thousand dollars will tunnel the mountain. A few thousand more will take the water within reach of every hundred acres. We have given three hundred thousand dollars for this land. Even at fifty dollars an acre, it is worth ten million dollars. My ward's two hundred thousand dollars will grow to one million dollars. Isn't that a justification for you and me as well?"

Elijah shook his head.

"If it should fail?"

"If," Mrs. MacGregor emphasized the conjunction, "is one of the first steps toward failure. You could go to Ysleta tomorrow, and sell this whole property, as it stands, for twice the amount we have paid down for it, even including the mortgage of one hundred thousand."

Elijah was thinking aloud.

"With your four hundred thousand, you could repay your ward in full. You and I would then have one hundred thousand each. I could,—" he paused and then the words shot forth, "replace the fifty thousand I borrowed, and be a free man."

Elijah and Mrs. MacGregor were being enlightened as to each other. Mrs. MacGregor had not thought to have Elijah lean so heavily upon her; he had never supposed her to be so cold and heartlessly unprincipled.

"We are coming to no conclusion as to our next move." Mrs. MacGregor spoke with polite impatience.

"What do you propose?"

"We must organize a company."

"But we have no charter."

"We can get one."

"It will take time."

"We can make it as short as possible."

The matter of the charter was dropped for a time, to be discussed at intervals during the days that followed; but no conclusion was reached. Mrs. MacGregor was scheming; Elijah waiting for guidance. The guidance came, though not in the way Elijah would have chosen; but he was yet to learn that when we make our conditions, guidance is certain to come in the form of a dilemma with an imperative choice.

As Mrs. MacGregor and Elijah were again seated on the verandah and again discussing ways and means, a wagon stopped at the door, and from it alighted a brisk, self-sure man. He walked up the path, with a jaunty air and stopped at the foot of the verandah steps.

"Hello, Berl," he called out. "Fine place, this."

Elijah felt an involuntary tightening around his heart as he recognized Mellin, the ex-cashier of the Pacific bank. He returned the greeting, at the same time rising.

"Come up and have a chair."

Mellin tipped his hat back on his head, strode up the steps, and seating himself, spread his legs wide apart, and leaning forward with hands loosely clasped, rested his elbows on his knees.

"Mrs. MacGregor, Mr. Mellin," Elijah waved his hand from one to the other.

"Pleased to know you, Mrs. MacGregor. From the East, I take it?" Mr. Mellin revolved his head jerkily toward his newly made acquaintance, ending with a decided bob.

Mrs. MacGregor bowed slightly in return, but vouchsafed no word.

Mellin revolved his head toward Elijah, at the same time glancing at his watch which he clicked together and returned to his pocket.

"I came to see you on a little business matter, Berl; can I have a few minutes?"

Upon this blunt hint that she was not wanted, Mrs. MacGregor rose calmly and swept through the open door.

Mr. Mellin drew a huge, black cigar from his pocket, and between initial puffs, outlined his business.

"Hear you've been taking up a little land deal on your own account?" The cigar was well under way now and Mr. Mellin braced himself upright with one hand on the arm of his chair. His face was full on Elijah with a cunning look.

"Yes," Elijah answered briefly.

"You ain't going to swing it alone, I take it?"

"I haven't thought so far as that."

Mellin wasted no words.

"It takes time and money to get a charter just now. The less money, the more time; the less time, the more money." He tipped Elijah a knowing wink.

Elijah made no reply and Mellin resumed briskly.

"I've got just what you want. An omnibus charter that'll allow you to do anything from a straight deal to skinning suckers. I had a chance to get it cheap and I'll let you off easy."

"I don't know that I want it." Elijah spoke with deliberation; but his mind was working rapidly.

"Better take it; I can make it worth your while—either way," he added with a cunning leer.

Elijah felt a cold sinking of the heart. His chickens were coming home to roost sooner than he had expected. He recognized the fact that his note to the Las Cruces, secured by his interest in the company, was in the nature of a forced loan, after all; that it would sooner or later compel him to answer some ugly questions to some men in an ugly mood. The iron-gray face of Seymour rose uppermost in his mind.

"What do you want for your charter?" He steadied his voice with an effort.

"I'm not going to squeeze you, just because I've got you cinched. That isn't T. J. Mellin, Esq. 'Live and let live'; that's my motto; only live well while you're at it. We're a long time dead."

"What do you want for your charter?" Elijah repeated.

"Well," Mellin looked meditatively at the burning end of his cigar which he turned toward himself,—"I'm in need of a little cash just now. A matter of five thousand. One hundred thousand on time, in addition, will do."

"You won't get it. I'm not obliged to take your charter." Elijah's jaws snapped together, his eyes were narrowed to a slit.

"Just as you say, Berl. There are worse places than San Quentin. You and I would be taken care of there, at no expense to ourselves."

The state penitentiary had never seemed a reality to Elijah before. His face paled. Mellin noted the look with evident satisfaction.

"It's nothing to get white over. There's a heap more money near the doors of San Quentin than anywhere else. The closer the doors, the larger the heap. It takes a little more courage to grab it and run, that's all. I've tried it before."

"Will you take the one hundred thousand in stock?"

"That would be easy; too easy for me. No stock, thanks. Five thousand cash, one hundred thousand

in a six months, ten per cent note. First mortgage note. I'm prepared to deliver the goods." He drew a large envelope from his pocket, pulled out the charter and held it open before Elijah. "Omnibus goods. A license to pick the gilt knobs off'n the doors."

"Suppose I take your offer, what certainty have I that this will end your demands?"

"My word, Berl. 'Honor among, etc.' You know. Besides, the cinch isn't going to last always. You're going to be able to square yourself with the Las Cruces. That'll end me. I could make it unpleasant, but what's the use? Every one goes in sight of the doors sometimes; but it's only fools who get inside. I know."

Elijah rose slowly and went into the house. A little later, he returned and handed some papers to Mellin. They were a note for one hundred thousand dollars and a draft on a San Francisco bank for five thousand. In the note was this condition. It would be payable three months after the water should be turned into the main canal of the Las Cruces company.

Mellin read the note.

"I object to the conditional payment. The water may never be turned on."

"Then you are welcome to the land."

Mellin thought a moment.

"There's something in that."

"Everything," returned Elijah abruptly. "The company has nothing to do with this business. They will get the water as soon as possible."

Mellin again looked the papers over.

"Keno. Here's your license. It's worth more; but I told you I would be easy. So long." He shoved the papers into his pocket and started for the waiting wagon.

Elijah listened in a dazed dream to the crunch of the retreating wheels. He was not thinking of his crime nor of his temporary escape from its penalty. He was thinking of Helen Lonsdale, and of the effect of the knowledge upon her, should this ever come to her.

Mrs. MacGregor reappeared upon the verandah. Elijah handed the charter to her.

"We have six months in which to redeem ourselves." He offered no explanation; she asked none. There was no need. The walls of the house were thin, and moreover the windows were open.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

In the transaction with Mellin, there was one thing that cut Elijah more deeply than all others. Mellin had insisted that the mortgage be registered. He was too shrewd to let this pass by. He had a hold upon Elijah and he had no intention of loosening it without a consideration. The registration was a public recognition of the fact that Elijah had dealings with Mellin and on a large scale. There was no use in requesting that the transaction be kept in obscurity. The object of registration was publicity, and publicity was not confined to those concerned in knowing; the books were open to inspection by the busiest gossip as well as by the most earnest business man.

For the first time in his life, Elijah was learning the bitter lesson, that even divine guidance does not release the guided from responsibility for his actions. There was bitterness in his heart, the feeling that he had been betrayed.

Ysleta lived on sensations, and it was a dainty morsel, when the news of Elijah's connection with Mellin became known. Yet it had no malice toward Elijah, it simply welcomed him as one of them-

selves and this was what cut. He could no longer conceal from himself that he had fallen.

The news of course reached Uncle Sid and Winston. Winston was shocked, yet after the first effects had passed away, he recognized the fact, that after all, he was not surprised. Absorbed in his field duties, he had put from him for the time his feeling that Elijah was not wholly to be trusted, that for all his vaunted beliefs, he yet lacked the subtle sense of honor that would keep him true to himself and to his fellows. Winston did not know, nor did Uncle Sid, of the darker stain that was on Elijah's soul.

"Perhaps it ain't as bad as it looks," the old seaman remarked when he had broken the news to Winston.

"Perhaps not," Winston replied, "but I have been in pretty close touch with Elijah since he has been in California, and I know he's sailed close to the wind, mighty close," he added decisively.

Uncle Sid looked thoughtful.

"Where'd he get money to start with?"

Winston waited a long time before replying. He was turning over in his mind the best thing to be done. He felt that he could trust the old man.

"You remember the Pacific failure?"

"I reckon I do, young man. I have cause to. I lost fifteen dollars and sixty-five cents in that failure."

Winston smiled at Uncle Sid's earnestness.

"The Las Cruces lost more than that. An even fifty thousand. At least our books show that."

Uncle Sid started. He looked at Winston with wide-open eyes, every line of his wrinkled face drawn tense.

"I declare, Ralph, if I ever thought the Lord would lead 'Lige quite so far as that!"

"I guess, Uncle Sid, that you and I think alike about the Almighty's share in this transaction. If this isn't the devil's work, I don't know the gentleman."

Uncle Sid made no immediate reply. A little later they entered the Las Cruces office. Helen looked up as the door opened. A frank cordial smile illumined her face as she recognized her callers.

"Hello, Ralph! It's about time you came in. If you'd waited much longer, I'd have asked for a letter of introduction." She turned to Uncil Sid with the same cordial smile. "Well Captain, I see you aren't dry-docked yet."

"No. My seams ain't started yet. What water there is in these parts is just as wet as any."

"Oh we've got plenty of water here and we're going to have more."

"Yes, I guess you have, such as 'tis. Good enough for old-fashioned sailin' craft. But when folks ain't satisfied with goin' as fast as God's wind blows 'em, an' they put in engines an' boilers, the

dum water's liable to eat holes in their boilers an' blow 'em up." He looked around the room curiously. "There's a power o' steam escapin' around here. Where's 'Lige? Look's as if 'Lige had got a hole eat in his boilers, an' me an' Ralph's come in to see if we can help patch 'em up."

Helen noted the keen, old eyes and the humorous wrinkles that for all their humor were yet hard.

"He hasn't been in this morning; I expect him every moment."

Uncle Sid turned to Winston.

"It's your watch, Ralph. You take the wheel."

Winston felt reassured to a certain extent, by Helen's perfectly natural manner. There were the same frank eyes, the same friendly smile that he knew so well. Did she know all that they wished to know or was she as ignorant as they of all but public gossip? He was going to find out.

"I suppose you know, Helen," he began soberly, "that there are some pretty ugly rumors about Elijah flying around Ysleta?"

"Yes, I do know." Helen's face grew hard.

"How much truth is there in them?"

Helen met Winston's piercing look squarely.

"I don't know any more than you know." There was no apparent hesitation in her manner, but her thoughts were busy anticipating what was to come.

Ralph made an impatient gesture.

"We can talk till doomsday, Helen, and you can

answer and tell us nothing, if you choose. You know we are not gossips, and you know that we are Elijah's friends."

"Why didn't you say that to start with?" Helen flashed back. "You began asking me questions and I answered your questions truthfully."

Uncle Sid noted the strained situation.

"She's laid you broadside on there, Ralph; that gun is out o' action. You'll have to limber up another battery."

Winston and Helen both turned to Uncle Sid; then, smiling, their eyes met and the threatened storm passed by.

"Just what is it, Ralph?"

"We want to know the whole business, Helen, so far as you know."

Uncle Sid again broke in.

"When a bell rattles, we want to know whether its cracked, or whether there's just something on it that can be got off."

"I don't think Elijah's cracked, Uncle Sid." She grew very sober as she turned once more to Winston.

"The rumor that Mellin holds Elijah's note for one hundred thousand dollars, that the note is secured by a mortgage on the Palm Wells tract, is true. These facts are recorded. I have seen the records. Further than that, I know nothing."

"Ur-r-rh!" grunted Uncle Sid, whose thoughts

suddenly reverted to Eunice MacGregor. "I guess I know the tree to smoke that coon out of."

Helen shot an intelligent glance at Uncle Sid, her lips parted, then she thought better of her impulse and remained silent.

Winston again turned to Helen.

"I shall have to ask you another direct question, Helen. Did the company get their deposit from the Pacific?"

Helen looked squarely at Winston.

"I don't know."

"Perhaps you don't *know*, Helen, but you are in a better position to guess than we are. There's no use playing with words. That Palm Wells business called for ready money. I know as well as you do that Elijah had no such amount. The question is, where did he get it?"

"If I knew absolutely, I would tell you. I will tell you what I do know, but I shall have to ask you to keep it to yourselves for a little." Then she told of Elijah's discovery of the frostless belt; how, half in jest, half in earnest, she had told him that she might avail herself of her knowledge; of Elijah's alarm; of their agreement to acquire the tract together.

"We have," she concluded, "got the Pico ranch in our hands. My five thousand is in it. There was fifty-five thousand paid down. Elijah did not tell me where he got the money, but I supposed at

the time that he had pledged a part of his holdings in the Las Cruces to raise it."

Uncle Sid looked up. There was sternness but yet kindness in the keen eyes that held Helen's.

"Don't you think you ought to know, Helen?"

Helen's face grew suddenly drawn and white.

"I have told you all that I ought to tell you, perhaps more than was right. I went into this business of my own free will and there have come complications that I did not foresee, but I am not justified in trying to free myself at the expense of another. I am telling you the truth so far as I know it. It isn't for me to make inferences."

The interview, so far as its object was concerned, was ended. Uncle Sid rose stiffly and took the girl's hand in his own.

"I'm afraid that you've made mistakes, lassie, but so have the rest of us. You've got stuff in you worth savin', an' we're goin' to stand by you."

Winston also rose. As Helen placed her hand in his, he said:

"Uncle Sid has spoken for me too, Helen." He held her hand for a moment only, but there was, in the clasp of it, that which went straight to her heart. She did not dare to look in his eyes. She had told him the truth as she knew it, but not as she suspected it. How much more could she have known if she would; how much more ought she to have known? She had not until now, seen clearly

where her course was bound to lead if followed to the end. Had she wilfully declined to see? She was going over her past, analyzing it clearly, logically, unsparing of herself. Even yet she could not understand the subtle influence with which Elijah had surrounded her, but at last her eyes were open to its danger. She had given admiration, sympathy, her best to help him, her warm but disquieting friendship. Here she stopped abruptly, her eyes wide open, her face scarlet, her heart throbbing in an agony of pain and shame. The parting pressure of Ralph's hand came to her, the eager look of sympathy which she had felt but not seen. She longed to hear his voice again, to feel the touch of his hand in her own. Slowly she raised her head. Her face was pale and set. Her sins were upon her; the sins of innocence, but the burden was none the lighter for that; yet she would bear it alone and in silence.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

It was late in the afternoon of the same day when Elijah came to the office. There was the old rush and swing in his motions, but there was also a tense, restless light in his eyes that told of a mind not at peace with itself; of a mind still determined, but lacking the old time confidence. He returned Helen's greeting effusively, but his manner was forced, not spontaneous. He went to his desk and began nervously rummaging the accumulated papers. Frequently he called Helen to him to help straighten some simple matter.

She bore his nervous petulance with patience, for she felt that she knew the cause of his agitation. In sheer desperation, Elijah was bent upon making trouble, knowing that in every detail he was wrong, knowing that even the cause of his agitation was of his own creation. The gossips of Ysleta told him this; told him in words that he could not twist into a defense of himself, and this increased his nervous petulance. He was wrong, terribly wrong, and he knew it, knew that he was trying to make wrong, right. Point after point he brought up with Helen, only to have each explained in a

way that he was compelled to admit was without fault.

Helen was patient. She thought that she knew. Her own bitter suffering made her understand. Her heart went out in great throbs of sympathy toward the sorely tried man, who had done wrong and was repenting, even as she had done wrong and was now bent upon righting it.

At last, however, after an unusually severe and wholly unwarranted outburst, she threw down the paper which she held. Patience had ceased to be a virtue. It was a menace, not only to herself, but to the man toward whom it was exercised.

"There's no use going on in this way any longer, Elijah! There's no trouble where you are bent on finding it. It's in the beginning. Let's go back and straighten that out, then we can get somewhere."

"Well, what is it?" There was an exasperating twist in Elijah's words.

Helen passed it by.

"I've done wrong and I know it. I wanted to get ahead, and getting ahead meant money. I couldn't get into the Las Cruces—"

"I gave you the chance," interrupted Elijah.

Helen paid no heed to the interruption.

"So I began to look around for myself. You know the rest."

"There's no use going back to that." Elijah spoke impatiently.

"Yes there is use," Helen persisted. "You have done wrong and you know it. You're trying to square yourself by finding fault with me. It's no use. The farther you go, the worse off you are. The long and short of it is, you can't throw dust in your own eyes."

"I'm not trying to throw dust in my own eyes." The very vehemence of his denial gave the lie to his words.

"You are trying to, and you can't. Nothing can blind your eyes to the fact that you are a criminal."

Elijah's eyes were blazing through their narrowed lids.

"I won't allow even you to say such things to me."

"If you would only say them to yourself, it wouldn't be necessary. I hate to say it, Elijah, but,—you took fifty thousand dollars of the company's money. That's embezzlement. It's a crime." Helen voiced her long suppressed suspicion. "You smoothed it over by putting in its place your note for the amount, secured by your stock in the company."

"Have you been through my private papers?" Elijah burst out.

"That's not to the point; but no, I haven't."

"Then how do you know this?"

In spite of herself, in spite of her growing horror at the weakness of this man who had seemed so strong, Helen could not repress a touch of womanly sympathy in her reply.

"Because, Elijah, I know you."

Elijah was not to be turned easily from a real wrong. It was good to feel a just cause of resentment.

"You have no right to pry into my private affairs. I have given you no warrant for it."

"Yes, you have given me a right. I am associated with you in this business and I have a right to know. I wish you would tell me if I am right in my guess."

The impulse was strong in Elijah to attempt to deceive Helen even as he had long deceived himself, but there was a look in her eyes that weakened the impulse.

"Why?"

"Because that would square you with yourself. You could hunt a way out then, and I'm ready to help you. But you haven't answered my question yet. Am I right?"

"Why do you want to know?"

"Ralph and Uncle Sid were in to see you this morning."

"What about?"

"Seymour will be here soon—"

Elijah interrupted.

"Who's told Seymour?"

"When he comes," Helen went on, "he'll ask questions. He won't be particular about the questions; but he'll be mighty particular about the answers. You know what he'll ask, and you know what you'll be obliged to answer. Do you want to get ready, or do you want him to fall on you in a heap?"

Elijah could not conceal his agitation. He moistened his dry lips with his tongue. As he had argued with himself, so he began to argue now; not to Helen, but to the vision she had forced his eyes to see.

"I saved the company from loss. If Mellin had not been a friend of mine, he never would have warned me that the Pacific was going to fail. I saved the money for the company. I wanted the money, I needed it to carry on my work. I didn't embezzle it, I gave the company my note. It is secured at twice its value, by my entire holdings in the Las Cruces company." Elijah's face was drawn; his eyes had an eager, hunted look.

Was this pitiful creature the man who had so moved her? Helen would have given the world to have taken that look from his eyes; to have put in its place the clear, inspired light that had at first so drawn her to him; but she hardened her heart.

"Elijah, you're a hypocrite! You've got the instincts of a thief without his courage. This stuff

doesn't go with me. You took the company's money. Make good or take the consequences."

Elijah sprang to his feet.

"My God, Helen! I won't listen to such things. You've no right to say them."

Helen calmed herself with an effort.

"I was quoting Mr. Seymour. Would you rather wait and hear him directly?"

Elijah made a pathetic gesture as he sank back in his chair.

"I didn't think you would turn on me like this, Helen."

Helen rose and placed her hand on Elijah's shoulder, He could not see her face, and she no longer tried to keep her eyes from showing the conflicting emotions that almost overpowered her.

"I haven't turned on you, Elijah. I'm not going to turn on you. I believe in you yet. We've made a mistake. We must find a way out."

"You made a mistake?"

"Yes. When you paid Pico the fifty thousand, I felt quite sure that a part of it must have come from the Las Cruces. I am as guilty as you are."

Before she could prevent, Elijah had snatched her hand from his shoulder and was pressing it to his lips. Helen wrenched her hand from his lips. As if drawn by her resisting hand he rose to his feet, his burning eyes resting on hers. In vain she tried to withdraw her hand from his fierce clasp.

"Don't leave me, Helen, don't leave me!" With wide open arms he sprang toward her.

With hardly a perceptible motion, she was beyond the reach of his outstretched hands. She had no palliating knowledge of his inner thoughts, no knowledge of the malevolent suggestions of Mrs. MacGregor, no knowledge of the scene in Elijah's house, where the lamplight fell on a tear-stained, baby face, on blistered sheets with hopeless figures, upon renunciation, as Elijah closed the door and deliberately put his wife from him.

Helen stood erect, composed, her eyes filled with loathing, contempt, but not for Elijah alone. This was the hardest to bear. What had she said, what had she done to bring this horrible thing upon herself?

Elijah slowly grasped the meaning of Helen's eyes. She had not spoken. There was no need that she should speak.

"No! no! no! Helen, not that, not that; you don't understand."

"Stop! I won't listen. Not to a word."

"You will! You must!" There was no passion now either in words or looks, only a set determination to be heard.

Try as she would, Helen could not stop the explantation he offered, the palliation of his sins past and to come. Even as he had said, she was com-

pelled to listen, but there was no softening of her eyes, no change in the set, hard face.

"You and I cannot stay any longer in this office. You will go or I." Elijah made as if to speak. "Stop!" Her voice was imperative. "I would be justified in leaving everything, but I began this wretched business and at whatever cost to myself, I will see it through."

Elijah felt the hopelessness of further words. Like one in a horrible dream, he turned to his desk and began to straighten his papers.

"I will attend to that. Go!"

Without a word or look, Elijah closed the office door behind him.

It required all Helen's fortitude to control herself. She attempted no self-palliation, she put this aside. She had been innocent of intentional wrong doing, but this made no difference. The fact was beyond recall. Only the future was hers in which to make atonement at whatever cost to herself.

CHAPTER NINETEEN

Uncle Sid and Winston, after leaving the office, went toward the Rio Vista. Winston was the first to break the silence. He spoke musingly.

"Helen doesn't absolutely know whether Elijah got that money or not. If she had known certainly, she would have told us. But she suspects that he got it and used it, or at least a part of it. There are only two who do know surely, Mellin and Elijah. Mellin has a strong hold on Elijah, or he couldn't have got that note from him. Elijah drew the money, converted it to his own use, and Mellin knows it and is making Elijah pay him to keep quiet."

"Well!" Uncle Sid stopped abruptly and thrust his walking stick into the sand. "Well!" he repeated, "what are you going to do about it?"

"I'm going to hunt Mellin down and make him give up." Winston's jaws set.

Uncle Sid smiled grimly.

"Well, young man, I'm all-fired rejoiced that you ain't a-huntin' me. I'm goin' a-huntin' too."

At the Rio Vista they parted. Uncle Sid stumped up to the hotel office.

"Say, senner," he was addressing the clerk, "Mrs. MacGregor ain't been sighted yet, has she?"

The clerk smiled affably.

"Not yet, Captain. Expect her to make port today. Any messages?"

"Yes, plenty, but I'll deliver 'em myself."

Mrs. MacGregor made port promptly and as promptly Uncle Sid began to deliver his message.

"Well, Eunice, it seems you've finally settled to the conviction that there's more money in a servant o' the Lord than in folks that's got handles to their names."

"What do you mean, Sidney?"

"What do you mean, Eunice, takin' your ward's money an' puttin' it into this wild-cat business?"

"I'm not aware that I have told you or any one else what I have done with Alice's money."

"I'm perfectly aware o' you, Eunice, an' I have been for a good many years. You ain't got a cent o' your own an' you've been spungin' off from Alice. She didn't seem to mind, so I didn't interfere; but this is different. You just back right out now or I'll make you." Uncle Sid's face was not pleasant to contemplate.

Mrs. MacGregor smiled complacently.

"It seems to me that you are very suddenly and deeply interested in my doings."

"I am!" Uncle Sid snapped out. "An' for two reasons. In the first place you are swindling Alice

out o' her money, an' in the second, the good name o' the Harwoods is in danger. Either one is enough to rile my fightin' blood, an' take 'em both together, I'm fifty years younger'n my birthday calls for."

Mrs. MacGregor spoke coldly.

"You are very much mistaken, Sidney, if you think you are frightening me."

"I am mistaken. I never thought you a fool, I declare if I did! Not this kind. Accordin' to my notion, you've tried on a powerful lot o' different kinds o' fool, but I never thought you'd settle down to this."

Mrs. MacGregor vouchsafed no reply. She went to her closet, and began sorting various articles of clothing and laying them out on the bed.

"What are you up to now?"

"I'm going East on business."

Uncle Sid rose to his feet and walked to Mrs. MacGregor. Laying his hands on her shoulders, he turned her sharply till her eyes met his. The eyes that looked coldly into his had a well-bred, unruffled stare, exasperatingly insolent, exasperating, because they gave no open ground for resentment.

"Eunice, I'm going to make a fool of myself. I've got two hundred thousand laid up in the best kind o' securities. They bring me in ten thousand a year. You just get back that girl's money, an' I'll give you this so long as I live. If I go first,

an' it's likely I will, I'll fix it so you'll get it so long's you live."

Mrs. MacGregor spoke calmly.

"Why didn't you say this to me before?"

"Because there's been no especial reason for my making a fool o' myself before."

Mrs. MacGregor, still looking into her brother's eyes, thought rapidly. Her regret that Uncle Sid had not spoken before was sincere. She would accept now if she could. She thought of accepting Uncle Sid's offer and then trying to free herself; but if she should fail, she knew that Uncle Sid would not hesitate to cut her off instantly, and without mercy. She was convinced that there was no way out of it. Elijah would fight against it, Mellin would oppose everything before he would let go his hold. More sincerely than she had ever regretted anything in her life, she regretted her inability to accept her brother's offer. There was only one way open—to go on. Her calm, cynical smile was more exasperating than her stare.

"Alice will be down from San Francisco in about two weeks. I want you to take care of her while I am East."

Uncle Sid was answered. He thrust his sister from him so violently, that she staggered to regain her balance, but the calm, insolent smile never left her face.

"I'll take care o' her. I'll take care o' her, an' you too, an' that servant o' the Lord."

Uncle Sid stamped from the room. Mrs. MacGregor summoned a messenger from the office. He was instructed to secure a ticket that evening for the overland express. Then she resumed her preparations for departure. She had arranged all details with Elijah. The Palm Wells company had been fully organized, its officers chosen. To Mrs. MacGregor was entrusted the task of raising the necessary funds—for what? Both Mrs. MacGregor and Elijah had avoided these details.

Mrs. MacGregor was promptly on hand for the overland express, and it was with a great and growing sense of satisfaction and importance that she settled herself in her sleeper. Her journey to the East was not so pleasant as she had anticipated; but her hand was turned to her voluntary task, and she could not now go back if she would. She put aside disagreeable impossibilities and gave her thoughts to her future, the raising of money to further her schemes and Elijah's.

Uncle Sid had at once divined that his sister's first field of operations would be their native town and Elijah's. He accordingly took prompt measures to block her plans. He at once wrote to his banker, an old and trusted friend, giving him an outline of the situation and advising him against co-operation with Mrs. MacGregor. The keen busi-

ness acumen which had enabled him to accumulate two hundred thousand in first-class securities, pointed his written utterances in keen-edged words which never missed their mark, and invariably carried conviction with them.

Many a mickle makes a muckle, and the seafaring mickles of Mrs. MacGregor's native town which had been so painfully accumulated through many years of toil, and towards which that astute lady had turned expectant and longing eyes, were now plunging her into the depths of despair.

The denizens of Fall Brook turned greedy eyes to the golden promises she offered them, their ears were always open, but the end was ever the same. The knots in the stockings were only tied the tighter because of their canny greed and because of her words which threatened to despoil them. Finally the promises of Mrs. MacGregor, made to a scant but influential few, of stock in the Palm Wells tract, as a bonus for persuading their fellows to invest, added zealous recruits to her cause. These, however, not only failed in positive results, but defeated her every hope of success. In a land where the equality of individuals was the breath of life, the arbitrary choice of the few to be the leaders of the many was an insult which no self-respecting New Englander could fail to resent.

The gray-haired banker was Mrs. MacGregor's last resort. Urged by messages from Elijah, at first

urgent, then importunate, Mrs. MacGregor turned to the banker. He was tarred with the same stick as were his fellow citizens; moreover, he was in receipt of an extra stick from Uncle Sid. The letter that had traveled eastward with Mrs. MacGregor had received due consideration, and its contents had been judiciously distributed. With the same measure, with which for years she had measured her fellow townsmen, Mrs. MacGregor was being measured. Wounded pride, bitter, burning resentment, accompanied her on her return trip to California.

CHAPTER TWENTY

In any great and growing business, there is often a readjusting and shifting of duties from shoulder to shoulder, as one official after another discovers aptitude for a special line of work.

Thus it happened that, contrary to Helen's fears, no comment was excited either in the office itself or in Ysleta over Elijah's prolonged absence. In both places it was tacitly assumed that his new venture was consuming the greater part of his time. For some weeks most of the routine business transacted in Elijah's name had in reality been performed by Helen, so that it was easy for her to take upon herself the entire direction of the office work. In their intimate official relations, Helen had discovered Elijah's weak points, but this discovery had drawn her closer to him. In the multitudinous business details of the office, often petty and annoying, Elijah had shown a restless impatience, and an inability to straighten them out satisfactorily. He had discovered a lack of the subtle distinctions of honor and honesty, characteristic of a man of strong, rugged integrity. With the development of the

Las Cruces to a point of assured success, there had grown up in Elijah an increasing sense of the magnitude of his work and of himself.

Helen had taken the details of the office upon herself and with infinite patience she had worked them into harmony. She had been Elijah's conscience in a thousand different ways that were buried from sight in the work as a whole. Sometimes patiently, more often impatiently, Elijah had rebelled against her insistent suggestions, but in the end he had yielded. To a certain extent Helen had been blinded as to the real Elijah by her preconceived notions of him. She had regarded him as a great man with great ideas. With this central thought she had looked leniently upon his faults, as weaknesses inseparable from greatness. With a loyal devotion, especially characteristic of women, she had largely submerged herself in Elijah. She had gradually come to believe in him almost as he believed in himself. The disintegrating effects of this belief upon her character were gradual and insinuating. She was deteriorating from the strong, sturdy sense of honor that had been her chief characteristic. Upon Elijah, the effects of her loyalty were bound to be equally disastrous. She was his ideal of womanhood. She was his devoted ally. The result was a growing belief that what he desired was right and that this right should not be questioned.

Beyond a vague, ill-defined consciousness that she was getting on dangerous ground, Helen had given little thought to what might be the end of her intimate relations with Elijah. He was a married man. She had met his wife. The meeting had had the sinister effect of developing her sympathy for Elijah in a new line.

In the affairs of the Las Cruces, Helen had been Elijah's conscience. He had repeatedly yielded to her judgment. She had experienced a glow of satisfaction in this that had strengthened the bonds between them. Of late, she had been conscious that her influence was becoming less potent, but she had not connected this fact with the advent of Mrs. MacGregor. The first indication that Elijah's actions were not as wholly in her keeping as she had assumed was her suspicion of his transaction with the Pacific Bank. This had startled her, but to a certain extent she had glossed it over.

When she learned, not through Elijah, but through the published fact, of Elijah's mortgage to Mellin, the veil of his influence was thinned. It had startled her, shocked her, but it had strengthened her determination to make the venture a success, even at the price of an open rupture when her strength would be pitted against Elijah's. She had no fear for results; Elijah had placed too many weapons in her hands which she could use against him. She would compel him, if her influence failed.

If Elijah should force her to go to Seymour or Ralph, she was ready to take any consequences they might thrust upon her.

When she had learned, not by Elijah's voluntary confession, but by the confession which she had forced from him, that he had converted the company's money to his own use, and had in reality made her a party to it, the shock impelled her to open rupture and at once. Then came the reaction to pity for the strained, agonized face that pleaded more strongly for mercy than his words. Her thoughts were not deliberately logical, but vibrating from point to point.

Another swing of her mental pendulum and the confession of his guilty love came back to her with crushing, humiliating force. She could not forget the shame of it. Even to this day the pain was not lulled. But in the first withering humiliation, when the last remnant of the veil of her illusion had been torn away, the sense of self-preservation had been strong within her. The open rupture had come. From now on she must fight Elijah and alone, fight for her honor and his redemption if possible. In the days that followed she had forgiven Elijah, but she could not forgive herself without atonement. The forgiveness had not drawn her to Elijah, it had put him farther away. She forgave him in justice, for she felt that in some way, she did not see why, she could not reason why, but in some

way, she had opened the road that had led to his declaration. Personalities were at an end between them; she had a right to this much; but in the Pico ranch transaction, the end was not yet. She revolted against it in her heart, but in this matter were involved more than herself and Elijah. She would see it through; she must.

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

Neither the guests of the Rio Vista nor the inhabitants of Ysleta were as much disturbed over Uncle Sid's illiterate speech as was his sister. None of these knew what Mrs. MacGregor knew, that a lifetime spent before the mast and on the quarter deck is apt to counteract, in forms of speech at least, even a careful early education. Not all Mrs. MacGregor's polished manners and studied words could move a human heart to a single throb, nor could Uncle Sid's uncouth motions and clipped speech chill the loyalty of his many friends. His quaint humor that touched lightly, though unerringly, upon the foibles of humanity, blinded no one to the shrewd eyes that looked with no uncertain light upon the line that divided right from wrong. In short, Uncle Sid was sought after and welcomed where his polished sister was shunned, avoided, and heartily disliked.

Thus it happened that when Helen had named a date for the long talked of trip to the dam a goodly number of Uncle Sid's admirers were ready to go with them. Winston had been duly notified and was ready for their entertainment.

Helen was nearly if not quite as popular as Uncle Sid, though on different grounds. Her air of reserve was wholly apart from the spirit of camaraderie that welcomed Uncle Sid, but there was yet a kindly and humane atmosphere surrounding her that was good to breathe. Her reserve, instead of repelling, attracted and inspired a confidence and loyalty that needed but an occasion to arouse it to open manifestation. Contrary to her fears, had every secret which she was trying to bury in the chambers of her heart been published, this loyalty would have stood forth in fierce array between her and condemnation.

Early on the morning of the appointed day a jolly party formed in line at the doors of the Rio Vista, and, reinforced by carriages from the town, streamed out into the desert, along the banks of the Sangre de Cristo, and paused where the last aqueduct of the great canal was nearly completed. Here all was bustle and hurry, but confusion was absent. Unshaped timbers came to men with squares and saws, ready hands took them, and when squares and saws had done their work, passed them to other hands that raised them on squeaking derricks; the groaning ropes delivered their burdens to trestles where they were swung and fastened in position. There were no misfits. This had been provided against by keen-eyed, eager-faced youths with blue prints and transits, who directed the

squares and saws and plumbed the groaning trestles.

There were exclamations of surprise, of admiration, of approval from the visitors. Helen was profoundly moved. Winston's name was on every tongue, while Elijah was hardly mentioned. Back of the blue prints where the cut of every timber had been clearly drawn, where the position of every spike and bolt had been accurately defined, back of every spider-line in transits that unerringly fixed every placed timber, back of every motion of busy hands that moved out and in with no collision, Helen saw the engineer who had traced the drawings and had organized the work. Back of the engineer, she saw the man who had made this possible.

Helen was standing apart from the visitors. She was dumbly conscious that among these, like was gathering to like, even as she, though alone, was gathered to herself and apart from them all. One cluster, linked together by the common hope that this great work would even yet redeem their fallen fortunes; a second group, building other castles of cards from their former ruin; still another, unthinking, uncaring, unseeing, dancing, chattering, alive to the sunlight, alive to the bustle, alive to the enveloping spirit like particles of iron in the presence of a magnet, and as little conscious of the influences that were playing upon them. Every clink of hammer, every rasp of saw, every voice,

exuberant or subdued, was speaking of the triumph of one man, the possible disgrace of another.

The clusters broke and, led by Uncle Sid, regathered about Helen.

"Look here, Miss Lonsdale," said one, "if you will allow a suggestion, just fold your arms and hump your shoulders and the picture will be complete—Napoleon before the pyramids of Egypt."

"I didn't suppose that basking in reflected glory made one a subject for cartooning; if it does, we'll all pose together."

"Don't be too modest, young woman," Uncle Sid broke in reprovingly, "a fog bank may hide the sun but it gets its back blistered doin' it."

"Shall we start on?" suggested Helen; "it's a long way yet to the dam."

The road followed along the line of the canal, affording a complete inspection of the work. Only the canal was level, cutting through rolls, bridging arroyos, and boring through rocky hills too deeep for cuts. The country grew too rough for wagons as it neared the foot hills of the San Bernardinos, and here the road turned into the bed of the canal. There were occasional stretches where the bed was sandy; these were cemented to prevent loss of water by seepage. On the sides of deep gulches, the canal was cut in the steep banks, walled above and below to hold the stream in place. The work was inspiriting, exhilarating. It was the conquest of Nature,

or was it the higher Nature asserting itself, selecting and assimilating that which had hitherto been uncalled into active existence? Perhaps no one of the party asked himself the question, yet each felt that it was a great work, a great idea, a daring one.

At the mouth of the cañon, the canal ended. Across the cañon was built a deflecting dam of solid masonry. Where the canal led into the dam, massive gates were placed by means of which the water from the great reservoir in the mountains could be turned into the canal or cut off from it at will. Apparently there was not a contingency but had been foreseen and provided for.

On a level spot of ground near the gates, a messenger from Winston awaited the party to say that he was unavoidably detained, but that he would expect them the following day. Tents and food were waiting, and the night was pleasantly spent. Only the master of it all was absent.

Early in the morning the camp was astir and breakfast disposed of, horses were saddled and the party under way. Winston was better than his word, for he met them part way down the trail. His welcome was an ovation. Men and women crowded around, each eager to take his hand and pour congratulations into his reluctant ears.

"I accept, by proxy, for the real man." was his reply.

Uncle Sid awaited his turn. His loyal old heart

was bursting with pride over all he had seen. There was a suspicious brightness in the old man's eyes as, with Winston's hand clasped in both his own, he looked into his eyes.

"Ralph, my boy," he said, "I have no child of my own, but if I had, an' he'd done what you have, I'd want my heart steel-hooped to keep it from burstin'."

Winston's grip tightened on the knotty fingers.

"Thank you, Uncle Sid." Then withdrawing his hand, he slipped it through the old man's arm.

Uncle Sid stopped abruptly and thrust the hand aside, giving Winston an initial push.

"Now you go along where you're wanted. These folks are just burstin' full o' worship. It will do 'em good to let it out at a tin god, if they don't know any better. It's good for folks to worship somethin' besides themselves."

Through the long day that followed—it seemed long to Winston—Helen skilfully avoided him. Without seeming effort, she managed to be surrounded with others, giving Winston no word alone. Outwardly, she was her old buoyant self. Only to the keen eyes of Winston was her manner forced.

Towards night, Winston saw Helen and Uncle Sid standing together on one of the abutments of the dam. Without undue haste he joined them.

"Well, Helen, are you satisfied with the handiwork of your servant?"

"If you are my servant, why do you come into my presence without being bidden?"

"I asked my question first, and you haven't answered it."

"It strikes me that you are either presumptuous or hypocritical. Don't you think so, Uncle Sid?" She flashed her eyes toward Uncle Sid. There was a shade of annoyance in the look that she turned to Winston. "I believe you and Uncle Sid are fellow conspirators."

"Then I am not mistaken. You have avoided me today?"

"Suppose I have," she replied evasively.

"It's too late for that, Helen. You have given me rights and I claim them." Winston's voice was decided.

"You are harking back to barefoot rights. You perhaps remember that Uncle Sid said that these were only letters of introduction to shoes and stockings."

"Yes. And I humbly present them." Winston replied in the forced humor of Helen's words.

"But," protested Helen, "I have put away childish things, bare feet and all. See!" She thrust out a booted foot from beneath her skirt.

"That's only a boot, and I'm not in it."

"You're getting childish, Ralph, so you will have to go with the rest."

"I am willing, so long as I go with the foot."

Helen was walking slowly up the steep bank and through a thicket of scrubby pine. Uncle Sid had disappeared from sight. Winston laid a detaining hand on her arm.

"Wait, Helen, I have a great many things to say to you."

"This is a pleasure trip, Ralph. You can say things at the office." She turned and took a step forward, but only a step. Winston's hand was gentle but firm. Helen seated herself on a mat of pine needles. Her face was flushed with resentment. Was it resentment?

Winston noticed the heightened color. Its cause was a question with a doubtful answer, but he did not hesitate on that account.

"It's no use trying to deceive me, Helen. There is something troubling you, and seriously, too—"

"Suppose there is, may I not keep my troubles to myself if I choose?" She tried to speak firmly and finally.

Winston continued with no resentment and with no vacillation.

"If you are troubled about any affairs of the company, I ought to know; you should not keep it from me. If it is personal, I have no intention of forcing your confidence. I only want to ask you one thing. Don't you believe that I am your sincere friend?"

Helen strove to conceal her agitation. She

longed with all her heart to meet half way the open loyalty that was offered her. She longed to show him that she appreciated it, but—how could she be frank with him without disloyalty to Elijah? Elijah had forfeited her respect, but was he wholly to blame? He had absolved her from the obligations of friendship, but there were other obligations that she could not put aside. Together they had assumed business responsibilities, together they must meet them. She longed for Winston's advice, assistance, but how could she accept either without baring the secret shame that was festering in her heart? Strive as she would, she could not wholly control her voice.

"You have always been my friend, Ralph. Please try to believe that I appreciate it. You can't know what it means to me and I can't tell you. Won't you trust me a little longer?" She tried to steady the deep black eyes that she raised to him.

Winston caught the hand that trembled on the matted needles.

"Always, Helen, always."

She gently withdrew her hand, rising to go.

"Thank you. You may not know what you are promising." There was a pathetic smile hovering over the trembling lips. "Let's stop where we are."

"No." Winston was standing beside her. "I know more than you think I do, Helen. Elijah

Berl is a thief. You know it and I know it. He has involved you, in appearance at least. You are too honest, too loyal to leave him as he deserves to be left."

Helen rose to Elijah's defense.

"Not intentionally a thief, Ralph."

Winston's eyes flamed with indignation.

"He isn't an open, manly thief who steals and stands up to his act. He is a sneak who steals and unloads his punishment on others."

Winston's words smote hard. In no essential did they differ from those she had spoken to Elijah.

Winston waited for a moment, watching Helen's face.

"I know what you mean. He took the money from Mellin and appropriated it to his own use. He got you involved in the Pico deal. That isn't an open crime. It is a sneaking, cowardly crime, in that he is forcing you to bear a part of the odium."

Helen's voice faltered, but her eyes did not leave Winston's.

"That Pico business was begun before the Pacific failed. You are wrong there."

"I am not wrong," Winston burst in hotly. His indignation waxed against Elijah. "He is crooked from the crown of his head to the soles of his feet. So long as it was between himself and me I could stand it, but when it comes to you, I will endure it

no longer. He will quit or I will break him. I can and I will."

"You don't know all, Ralph, or you wouldn't say that." Helen's voice was firmer.

"I do know all. Don't I know that he has given the company his note, or pretended to, and secured it by his stock?"

Helen's eyes were on Winston.

"Do you know this?" She was honestly in doubt. Perhaps Elijah had confided in Winston after all.

"I have not seen the papers, but I know Elijah Berl. He has stilled his conscience without surrendering, one iota, his purpose. This note and security are in his own hands. When it comes to the point, he will find a new way to quiet what he calls his conscience."

"You do not know all, Ralph. You are unjust. This has gone far enough—too far." Helen spoke coldly. She felt compelled to, against the pleadings of her heart. She turned and began to move away.

Winston's hand was again on her arm, restraining her. She tried to free herself, but try as she would, she could not make the action final.

Winston's hand slipped down her arm till her hand rested in his.

"Helen, I would say all of this for the sake of friendship alone—"

She strove tc draw her hand from his.

"Stop, Ralph, stop right there."

"I will not." Winston's grasp tightened, he was drawing her towards him in spite of herself. "There is more than friendship, Helen. There is love. I cannot tell you how much; you will have to let me teach you."

His arm was around her now, his eyes striving to look into her own. The pulse of his words, the light of his eyes, the touch of his hand, there was in all these the clear, strong definition between mine and thine. Mine to desire, mine to ask, mine to plead for my desires; thine to give or to withhold that which is all and more than all to me. My heart, my life, my love; thy acceptance of my offering. No selfish pleading, no imperative demand, only a right to ask in undoubting confidence that which it was hers to give or to withhold. She felt his breath on her cheek, the warm glow of his lips nearer and nearer. She could not put them away; her heart cried out against it. Her will to resist, to act as her conscience dictated, was weakening. Only to be at rest, as she was resting now, at peace, no doubts, no fears; she longed for what in strength of mind and purity of heart he was offering her.

His clasp grew closer. Why should she not accept? Her senses were reeling in an ecstasy of surrender that gives all and gains all in the giving. As in a delicious yet terrifying dream, she shrank

closer to the protecting arms that would shield her forever.

"Tell me, Helen, that you love me, not as I love you, that is too much to ask, but tell me that you love me."

Her lips trembled in voiceless reply. How she longed to speak the words he desired her to utter. Why could she not? Then her eyes opened wide. Here was a clean heart and a pure life at her feet, strong, throbbing words pleading with her to accept the offering. What had she to give in return? What was she about to give? A stained heart; how deeply stained she did not, could not know, but stained, in exchange for a pure white soul.

She tore herself from his arms and stood before him, her hands outstretched against him. Her great black eyes were wide, and deep, and unfathomable. Only from their depths, a glow of longing love shone forth; of longing, sorrowing love, of sorrow for herself and of love for the man before her; yet love controlled by a will as strong as the strength of right could make it.

There was an answering light in the eyes that met her own. In them was pain and pleading, but no doubt. His hands reached out to hers that had put him away, but they dropped before they touched.

"Helen, your eyes have answered me." There

was a deep throb of exultation in his voice. "But let me hear you speak."

She stood with pale face and laboring breath. Her voice shook with the intensity of her emotion.

"I love you, Ralph. More than I can tell you in a lifetime, I love you." She spoke in obedience to a power beyond her will to control.

Winston sprang toward her, but her hand rested on his breast. She could feel the strong, even throb of his heart and this strengthened her will to resist.

"Listen, Ralph!" Her voice was intense but low; every word pierced like pencils of light in deep waters. "I have been cruel, mercilessly, selfishly cruel. I longed to hear you say what you have said. All my life I shall remember it as a penance for the wrong I have done you."

"I will not listen to such words." He clasped the hand that rested on his breast, but she tore it away.

"Don't tempt me further, Ralph."

He was again close beside her.

"Tell me all, Helen. You have given me the right to know."

"I have not, I cannot. If I should tell you, you would despise me. If I granted your wish, all my life I should loathe myself."

Ralph stood with eyes undoubting, unconvinced, but he could go no farther."

"Is it forever, Helen, hopelessly forever?"

"Don't ask me, Ralph, but forgive me." Her eyes were shining with unshed tears. "I am afraid it is. Will you, can you forgive me?"

Winston's lips set. There was a determination in his eyes that was yet softened by a great love.

"I have nothing to forgive. I love you and I shall always love you. Nothing you have said or can say will change it or weaken it. You do not see clearly now. Some time you will. Then I shall claim you and you will come to me."

Helen could trust herself no further, nor could she still the throb of hope his words had kindled. Was she mistaken after all? Was her sin as she saw it, but a gigantic empty shadow resting on a vanishing cloud which the clear light of reason would melt away? There had been conviction in his words, "Sometime you will see clearly, then you will come to me."

She was to outward appearances her old self as she mingled once more with the visitors on the way back to Ysleta. The enthusiastic crowd declared that they would see to it that the completion of the great dam was duly celebrated, and with one accord they voted that Helen was to swing the last stone into place. Helen objected, but to no purpose. She was told that it had all been arranged between them and Winston.

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

Seymour did not arrive in Ysleta as soon as Winston and Uncle Sid had expected, yet there was no doubt that he had heard of the Pacific failure and the consequent loss of a considerable amount of the company's funds. There was also no doubt that the news of Elijah's transactions with Mellin had been transmitted to him. His non-appearance puzzled them somewhat, but the fact that he had communicated with no one, officially at least, partly explained the situation to them. It must be that he felt perfectly secure and was taking his own time in which to act. Uncle Sid had not been ruffled and he went so far as to advise Winston against worry.

"Seymour's fixin' things to do when he gets out here. What's time for him is time for us. Let's you an' me fix up things while he's thinkin' about it." And that is what they proceeded to do and very effectively.

As a matter of fact, a prosaic wash-out on the line had prevented Seymour's bodily presence in Ysleta, but it had hampered in no way the presence of his spirit, nor did it hamper his thoughts. The

rumor of Elijah's defalcation had not disturbed Seymour seriously. He imagined he knew for what purpose the money had been diverted. He shrewdly guessed that it had been spent in the acquisition of new land. This was not displeasing, for the land could not get away and he could frighten Elijah into disgorging.

Seymour had been especially attracted by Winston. In the bottom of his heart, he had resolved at a fitting time to gather that young man to himself. His intentions were not born of purely philanthropic motives, for experience had taught him that greater heights can be scaled by the aid of others than by unassisted efforts. He felt sure that no one in California knew better what land was worth while and what was not, than Winston and Elijah; therefore, he again concluded that his money was really well invested. And so it happened that, after the wash-out had been repaired, he placidly resumed his journey.

Meanwhile Winston and Uncle Sid were at the Rio Vista.

"I think," Winston was saying, "that that wash-out has saved the day."

"I bet Mr. Seymour's been studyin' how to do things, an' while he's been studyin', we've been an' done 'em, that is, pretty near." Uncle Sid wheeled around in his chair and faced Winston. "Have you seen 'Lige lately?"

"No. I'm pretty sure that he's keeping out of sight purposely. I can't make anything out of him these days. He's taking an unusual amount of interest in my work lately. He's been from one end of the canal line to the other and I don't believe that there's a single stone or a shovelful of dirt in the whole dam that he doesn't know the size of; and yet I never run across him. I hear that he's giving the dam his especial attention just now."

"More than Helen?" Uncle Sid looked bluntly at Winston.

"Oh, that reminds me." Winston was trying to speak indifferently. "The dam will be finished next week. Helen is to swing the last stone into position. She said that she thought you would make up a party to go up with her."

"You'll start the first of the week? Yes, I guess I'll go." Uncle Sid was certain of it.

"Then I'll go up in a day or two and get things ready for you. The gates are closed, you know, and the reservoir is nearly full. The rains in the mountains have been unusually heavy this season."

"How are you makin' out with Mellin?"

Winston's smile was not pleasant to contemplate.

"I've got him all done but the finishing. He talked fight when I left him, but I think this will take it out of him." Winston held out a bundle of

papers to Uncle Sid. "Do you want to look them over?"

Uncle Sid shook his head as he pushed the papers aside.

"I've got a parcel o' papers too. Betwixt the two of us, I guess we have got things pretty well straightened out."

"How does Helen feel about it now?"

"She's stickin' to 'Lige like a barnacle. She says that 'Lige meant all right an' would have done all right, if Eunice an' Mellin had let him alone. She didn't say so, but I guess she meant she'd a made him, herself."

Winston's expression was skeptical, but it softened as he answered.

"She would have tried, all right."

"She would have succeeded too, if Eunice had kept out." Uncle Sid spoke with unusual emphasis. "If there's anything worth savin' in a man, a good woman's bound to save it. Things have looked pretty black for 'Lige an' for Helen too, but they'll come out all right. I don't like 'Lige's cat-a-waulin' any more than you do, an' you ain't seen the worst o' him yet, unless I miss my guess, an' you ain't seen the best o' him, neither. I can't understan' everything an' so I take some things on trust, an' I want to tell you this, Helen Lonsdale ain't the kind o' fish to bite on a bare hook, an' she bit hard on 'Lige."

"So did I. That is, I bit." Winston was thinking of the days when the Las Cruces was hair-hung. He was straight in word and deed. Right and wrong were too sharply defined in his mind to allow room for sympathy towards those differently constituted.

"I wish the whole thing was over," he burst out impatiently. "It makes me boil to have these Ysleta sharks looking cross-eyed at me."

Uncle Sid held up a warning hand.

"Don't think o' that, young man, don't think o' that. Just think how much worse you'd boil if you had anything to boil over. You go along now, an' do a little trustin' that counts. You needn't talk about who you are trustin' in, but 'twon't be any less appreciated for that."

CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

After leaving the Rio Vista, Winston went directly to the office of the Las Cruces company. In spite of the fact that he knew his hope was beyond reason, he could not repress a thrill of excitement as he opened the door and entered the inner office. His first glance was toward Helen. Elijah's desk was closed and his chair vacant as he felt sure it would be. It was his first meeting with Helen since she had left him on the mountain. He shrank from the formal attitude which their official relations compelled him to assume and to which he knew Helen would strictly hold him. Yet there were no abstacles to the exchange of assurances which might flash between their meeting eyes. This was all he asked for, all he could hope for at present.

"Has Elijah been in this morning?" He looked at Helen as he spoke.

"No, Ralph. I hardly think that you expected he would be." Helen's eyes softened for a moment as they met Winston's, then they grew formal, but it was enough.

"No, I didn't. I only hoped that he might be.

Have you any idea what he is up to?" Winston's tone was cynical.

Helen's face flushed painfully.

"You—" she began; then she paused. After all, Elijah was to blame. Winston's course had been as straight as the course of an arrow.

"I am a whited sepulcher. That is what you wanted to say, isn't it, Helen?"

"What makes you think so?"

"Because it's just what I am. I have been too hard on Elijah."

"I wish you had said something like this before—before it was too late."

"Too late?" he repeated. "What do you mean? Have you heard anything?" His face was anxious.

"No, I haven't. I only know that Elijah is thoroughly convinced that you have turned against him. That, and other troubles—Ralph, no man can stand the strain that he is under for long."

"You know Elijah as well as I do, perhaps better." Winston was profoundly agitated. "I would hunt him out and drag him home at once, if it were not for one thing."

"And that is?" Helen waited for Winston to continue. She knew that his words were a spoken thought, rather than addressed directly to her.

"So long as Seymour remains away, no one can speak with assurance. Elijah knows that. He

needs to feel firm ground under his feet. No one can put it there now." He paused a moment, then continued. "I'll do my best to straighten it out for him."

A messenger entered the office and handed a yellow envelope to Winston. He read the message and dismissed the boy.

"Seymour will be here tomorrow. We will soon be in a position to set Elijah on his feet I hope." Winston hesitated a moment, then went on deliberately. "I thought of having Elijah hunted up at once; but now I think it will be best to wait." He looked questioningly at Helen.

"I think you are right," she replied briefly.

Winston returned to the Rio Vista and went directly to Uncle Sid's room.

"Things are coming to a climax." He handed the message to Uncle Sid.

The old man's face had lost its humorous look. His shaggy eyebrows were lowered, only two bright sparks flashed from beneath them, steely hard.

"This mess is in a fair way o' bein' settled now, an' it ain't a minute too soon, either. 'Lige ain't goin' to stand this always."

"What had we better do first?"

"You know Seymour. Meet him at the train and get him over to the office at once. I'll be there. I think we can settle the whole business in an

hour." Uncle Sid's face relaxed into a grim smile. "He'll have to come to our terms."

"The main thing, after all, is to get there, and it begins to look as if we had done it."

There was a surprise to both in their immediate vicinity. The door opened without ceremony to admit Mrs. MacGregor. She was still in traveling costume. She nodded slightly to Winston, who rose as if to leave the room. Uncle Sid checked him.

"You stay right here, Ralph."

Mrs. MacGregor addressed Uncle Sid.

"I want a few minutes alone with you, Sidney, on business."

"Me an' Ralph are about as near one as they make 'em, I guess. You just go right on an' unburden your mind."

"The business to which I refer concerns you and me alone."

"Your ward and Helen Lonsdale are included, I guess. If they ain't, you'll have to wait. If they are, you go right on. You didn't raise enough money in Fall Brook to push you out of the Palm Wells mess. You take up the business right there."

Mrs. MacGregor looked at Winston with as much of an appeal in her glance as she could compel herself to make.

Winston settled himself even more firmly in his chair in compliance with Uncle Sid's request. Mrs.

MacGregor did not attempt to conceal her annoyance, but she followed her brother's suggestion and came to the point.

"Yes, I did fail to raise the money in Fall Brook that I had expected to raise without difficulty, and I fancy I know why."

Uncle Sid chuckled with evident satisfaction.

"Consequently," Mrs. MacGregor continued, ignoring her brother's interruption," the Palm Wells company is in precisely the same position now that it was when I left for the East."

"*I* should say that it was considerably steadier on its legs than it was. What's your opinion, Mr. Winston?"

"I should say so." Winston did not answer aggressively, his reply was perfunctory.

Mrs. MacGregor ignored Winston.

"I don't know what you mean, Sidney."

"Me'n Ralph knows. It ain't necessary you should know."

Mrs. MacGregor's patience was sorely tried, as Uncle Sid fully intended it should be, but she gave no visible signs of annoyance for two excellent reasons. In the first place, a display of emotion smacked of vulgarity; in the second place, she felt that all of her deep-laid schemes depended upon her perfect self-control.

"We are getting nowhere, Sidney. Let us come to the point at once. Our company is temporarily

embarrassed and I feel that you are partially responsible for my not raising the money that I had expected, so I am coming to ask you to help us out. Not only is the success of the company at stake but the honor of our family name as well."

She would have gone farther, but Uncle Sid blazed in. He was quite unhampered by the fear of the vulgarity of displayed emotions.

"The honor of our name!" he exploded. "What Harwood in three hundred years was ever false to a trust? What Harwood but stood still in his tracks rather than even look at a crooked path? What Harwood ever used the weakness of his neighbor for his own good?"

"Sidney!" Mrs. MacGregor's voice trembled.

"Keep still! I'm on deck now!" Uncle Sid bent before his sister and shook his knotted fingers in her face. His eyes were blazing, his face rugose with deep, hard lines.

"Do you know what you've done, Eunice? You saw 'Lige Berl stumblin' betwixt right and wrong, an' for the sake of a few dirty dollars you pushed him over! That's what you did. You knew what our old New England name was worth to a man like 'Lige, and instead o' usin' it to pull him out o' the mud, you used it to push him in deeper. You congered a dyin' woman into trustin' her daughter's fortune to your hands, an' you've betrayed the woman an' stole her daughter deaf, dumb an'

blind. Now you're in trouble, you're a comin' to me to keep the honor o' the Harwood name. I wanted to keep the honor o' the Harwood name, so I called on this young man to help me an' he's done it, because the same good, red blood is soakin' his bones an' muscles as has soaked the bones an' muscles o' the Harwoods. Betwixt us, we've got the company out o' trouble, an' betwixt us, we will keep it out. We'll get you out o' trouble too, and we'll keep you out o' this! Now we're goin' to hunt up 'Lige an' get him out o' trouble too. We hope he may be worth it."

Uncle Sid straightened and dashed a handkerchief over his swollen face. Mrs. MacGregor sat pale and silent. When Winston began to speak, she turned to him with lips that trembled on the verge of speech.

"I deeply regret the necessity of all this, Mrs. MacGregor, but there is no other way except before an open court." Winston briefly but clearly set forth the status of the Palm Wells company. He assured Mrs. MacGregor that Mellin had been effectually and forever silenced, and in confirmation of his words, showed Mellin's note, from which her name and Elijah's had been torn. "Now I am going to ask you to sign these papers; this done, the last obstacle will be removed from your brother's path."

"Suppose I refuse?"

Winston's face set.

"I advise you not to."

Mrs. MacGregor held out her hand for the papers. She affixed her name where Winston indicated.

"What next?"

Uncle Sid answered.

"There's nothin' more to keep you in California. Just go, an' when you want money within reason, let me know."

Mrs. MacGregor rose and turned to the door that led to her room. Winston was before her and held the door ajar, closing it behind her; then he faced Uncle Sid. The old man approached him and laid a clumsy but affectionate hand on his shoulder.

"I ain't worth a cuss at quotin' scripture, but it strikes me that it ain't every one who's yappin' 'Lord, Lord,' as gets into heaven. Now you go below an' tomorrow we'll lay alongside o' Seymour."

CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

Winston was at his post when the great "Overland Express" rolled into the station at Ysleta, with clanging bell and coughing air-pump and dazzled sunbeams dancing from its varnish.

Winston was an engineer and he was not impervious to a stimulating thrill at the exhibition of power and progress of which the train was a type, from the ponderous, six-wheeled locomotive, to the last car of the shining train that it dragged. This thrill did not interfere with business and he had imperative, pressing business on hand. His quick eye singled out the man for whom he was waiting and almost as quickly he was by his side.

"Good morning, Mr. Seymour."

Without any haste, Seymour's grip was in his hand, and with no conscious volition on his part, Seymour was threading his way at Winston's side through the throng of disembarking passengers, those waiting for incoming friends, curious loafers, and rattling express trucks.

"Have you had breakfast?" Winston hardly paused, as they left the station and came out upon the gravelly, palm-fringed walk.

"Yes, and a good one too. The dining service has improved. Couldn't do much better in New York."

"That's a good deal for a New Yorker to say. It's worth money to the road; at least, it would be if they got hold of it."

"What's the program for today?" Mr. Seymour dropped pleasantries.

"If you're not tired, we'll go to the office at once. They are expecting us."

"Will Mr. Berl be there?"

"No. Not today."

"Hasn't he been notified."

"No."

"Why?" Seymour asked sternly.

"This, and much more, will come out at the meeting."

As Seymour swung along beside Winston, there was a meditative smile on his face. He was not accustomed to receiving curt answers to his inquiries. He had been watching Winston narrowly, and his first favorable impressions were being strengthened. Besides, he had lost no confidence in his own ability to take care of himself. They reached the office and entered.

Winston handed Seymour's grip to a waiting boy, and, without further ceremony, entered the private room. Uncle Sid and Helen were already there.

"Mr. Seymour, I think you have met Miss Lonsdale?"

Seymour greeted Helen with conventional affability; she was conscious of a piercing, though momentary, glance that seemed to read every nook of her soul.

"Captain Harwood, shake hands with Mr. Seymour." Winston made use of the hearty Western formula.

"Pleased to do so, Senner."

"Senner" was Uncle Sid's version of the stately Spanish señor, which had greatly taken his fancy. Neither the cordial "senner," nor the beaming smile, hid from Seymour the rectangular lines of the wrinkled face.

The party seated themselves, and before there was a suggestion of an embarrassing pause, Uncle Sid broke in. His glance shot from face to face then rested on Winston.

"We're cleared for action. Mr. Winston, it's your watch."

Seymour glanced appreciatively at Uncle Sid.

"You're naval, I see."

"Aye, aye, sir; from main truck to orange groves."

Winston began to speak. There was neither haste nor deliberation.

"There is no use in preliminaries. I take it, Mr. Seymour, that what brought you out here, was the

theft of the fifty thousand dollars of the company's money?''

Seymour nodded curtly to Winston's question. Winston resumed.

''There's no use calling it by a softer name; but I submit that there were modifying circumstances which may appeal to you. Miss Lonsdale will submit them; Mr. Berl will not be here. No one knows exactly where he is. I am sure that he took the money without, at the time, realizing fully what his act would be called. I think I am right in saying that he is driven to desperation, now that he is brought face to face with his own interpretation of what he has done. If you insist, I am confident that he can be found within twenty-four hours, and that he will come here of his own accord, but I hope that you will not insist upon this step. When I find him, I want to be able to tell him exactly what he is to expect.''

Without comment, Seymour turned to Helen.

''What are the modifying circumstances?''

Without a quaver, Helen met Seymour's piercing glance. She was alive to the fact that a single false step might mean ruin to Elijah, but she did not fear.

''For years, Mr. Berl has studied the conditions of orange growing, not only in this country, but in others. Previous to the organization of the Las Cruces company, he began a series of investigations

as to the ranges of temperature. These investigations were not completed at the time this company was formed, farther than this. He had found that the greater part of the lands now held by the Las Cruces were in a belt where the temperature never went to freezing. He did not then know how much more extensive the belt was. At that time he transferred every foot of land which he controlled." Helen paused, looking at Seymour. He appeared politely patient, questioning the bearing of her words. She resumed.

"From this time he did not act alone, nor was he alone responsible for what was done. In my capacity of secretary, I discovered, what he did not tell you of, that is, the frostless belt. From maps, I found that the belt reached into territory not owned by the company, and I brought these facts to his notice. Whether rightly or not, this does not matter, he feared that I or others would make use of this knowledge. This fear led him to act at once without consulting the wishes of the company. There were movements on foot to secure this tract without knowledge of its special value, simply for its speculative value. Mr. Berl acted at once. At this time the Pacific Bank failed, and the fifty thousand dollars saved to the company through his influence,—I don't pretend to defend this,—was used by him for the purchase of the Pico ranch.

"One moment," Seymour interrupted. "Did Mr. Berl intend to restore this money?"

"I can only give you facts, Mr. Seymour, not opinions."

"Very well. But from your own showing, if other parties had secured this property, we would have had the revenue from the sale of the water and our money beside."

"I don't think that follows. But the actual fact is, that other parties did not get this tract and that Mr. Berl did."

"Has Mr. Berl got it now?"

"He has not."

Uncle Sid interrupted.

"I expect I can contribute some facts, Senner. The truth is, your company would have been fifty thousand dollars out, if it hadn't been for 'Lige Berl,—I don't defend him, either. As it is, you've got a bank account fatter than it was, an' I'm owner o' the Pico ranch."

"And our money having been risked without our consent, you are getting the sole benefit of it?" Seymour's voice was biting.

"That's just as you say, Senner. I'm goin' to let in a few others, Helen an' Ralph, an' we've no objections to you if you want to come in."

Seymour's face flushed angrily. He mistook the kindly old man's offer for a bribe.

"I've made money, but I've made it honestly, not by taking bribes."

Uncle Sid's face grew purple. His eyes shone from a maze of deep, hard lines.

"Look here, Mr. Seymour, I've got a name reachin' back three hundred years. You just shin up your jenny-logical tree an' shake out your ancestors, an' I'll match 'em as they fall, hides, an' horns, an' taller, an' what's more, if they line up better'n mine, I'll go along where you're more than half minded to send 'Lige."

Seymour was quick in thought and quick in action. He saw that he had been mistaken. A kindly, if somewhat cynical, smile softened his face.

"I beg your pardon, Captain. I won't put you to that trouble."

"No trouble at all, Senner, if 'twill ease you up any." Uncle Sid's face relaxed.

"I think you have all of the essential facts, Mr. Seymour," Winston began. "Mr. Berl took fifty thousand dollars of the company's money. It has been returned. According to the strict interpretation of the law, this restitution does not free Mr. Berl from its penalties. If you fail to prosecute, it will have the appearance of compounding a felony; that is, if Mr. Berl took the money with no intention of restoring it. Whether he had such intentions, no one, not even Elijah himself, can prove before the law. The question is, whether we will

prosecute Mr. Berl, or whether we will forgive the past, and try to restore him to himself."

Winston looked fixedly at Seymour. There was an anxious hush as he ceased speaking. Seymour rested motionless with his eyes on the floor. At last he looked up.

"When I started out here, it was with the full expectation of finding you all more or less involved in this business. From what I have seen and heard since I have been in this office, I am prepared to say, without reservation, that my suspicions were groundless. So far as I am concerned, Mr. Berl is a free man with no shadow of fear. This affair can be kept strictly to ourselves with no injustice to any one. We will consider this episode in our history closed once and for all."

Uncle Sid's face was wreathed in smiles.

"I want to beg your pardon, Senner. You make me think of these prickly pears out here. They're mighty fine eatin' when you get the spines off 'em."

CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE

The fact that the way of the transgressor is hard, was being ground into the shrinking soul of Elijah. As yet, the grinding was of no avail because he refused to recognize that he was a transgressor. For years he had dreamed, and worked, and planned, and in it all he had been alone. Men would have called it alone, but not so Elijah. The Lord was with him. At least this was his fanatical belief. Alone, or with the still, small voice, not always interpreted aright, he had with infinite patience dreamed his dreams, wrought out his tasks as they came to him, and still alone, he had seen them shaping to a definite end. He had, like a solitary player, shuffled his cards, had dealt them and played in strict accordance with the game or modified them at will, and there was no one to say him nay. Even Amy had strengthened this growing habit of looking upon himself, his will and his desires as infallible.

Unconsciously he had carried this inflexible attitude of mind into the game, when necessity had compelled him to admit partners. He resented the insistence of others, that they should be considered

as having rights equal to his own. He demanded unconditional surrender, implicit obedience to his will. He reasoned with a sophistical show of right that the great idea was his, that what he gave was given in the fullness of his heart, and that it was only base ingratitude that prompted the recipients to oppose and thwart him.

Winston had opposed and thwarted him in a thousand details, and though Elijah had outwardly yielded, he had not essentially changed, though he was learning many lessons. He had learned to distinguish between what Winston would accept and what he would reject, but involuntarily and unconsciously there was growing up within him a burning hatred of Ralph Winston. There was a seeming lack of sympathy in the rugged integrity of Winston that clove through the heart of things. Winston knew only north and south. If a needle swung to these points, it was right; if it did not, it was wrong, and he had no use for it.

Elijah was growing jealous of Winston. He said nothing, but he noticed that, in the field especially, and to a certain extent in the office, details were more and more referred to Winston, even by Helen. Winston's name was on every tongue. It seemed to Elijah as if profit, and honor, and prestige were slipping from him and falling upon Winston. He was being defrauded. It never occurred to him that Winston's complete surrender

of heart, and soul and mind to the successful fulfilment of his dreams, all testified far more strongly than honeyed words of praise to the worthiness of the idea which he had conceived.

He had turned to Helen Lonsdale. With no less rugged ideas of right and wrong, they had been clouded in Helen with the dangerous sympathy of a woman's heart. With sympathy, Helen had softened the blows she had dealt him. To a certain extent she had kept him right, but because the blows had not pained, they lacked a compelling power. Her intuition, stimulated by her belief in him, in his essential greatness, had been quick to detect every changing mood; in her womanly sympathy, her efforts to soothe and comfort had been unstinted.

In spite of all condemning appearances, these influences were having an unconscious effect for good upon Elijah, until the advent of Mrs. MacGregor. She nursed his sense of wrong, stimulated his belief in himself, fed his morbidly craving soul with honeyed food that fattened it for the hand of the slayer.

Yet Mrs. MacGregor had missed her mark. She had counted upon a possible sometime awakening of Elijah, but before the awakening she had intended to have him fully in her power. She had not reckoned at its full value the impatient greed of Elijah; she had not reckoned on the womanhood

of Helen Lonsdale which, though struggling in a fog of sinister influences, never lost consciousness of its own identity.

When, on the morning of his declaration to Helen, Elijah left the office, it was as one stricken with a numbing wound. He was not conscious of its meaning, only of the sickening absence of pain which, coupled with the knowledge of the wound, filled him with an unknown terror. As the meaning of it all slowly dawned upon him, the stinging, biting pain played full upon every tingling nerve. He became filled with blind, ungovernable, impotent rage. He raged against himself, against Helen, against Mrs. MacGregor. He would have returned to the office at once; what darker crime he might have committed, only imagination can suggest, but return was impossible. When the thought came to him, he was far beyond Ysleta, surrounded by desert sands that dragged at his feet till physical exertion was no longer possible. Burning with thirst, weakened by hunger, he threw himself upon the hot sands and watched with unconscious eyes the fierce sun sink into the Pacific.

It was here that a wandering vaquero chanced upon him. The simple Mexican knew naught of the delirium born of a frenzied mind, but he knew the delirium of blood thirst that lack of water brings upon the desert wanderer. With this knowledge and belief, he carried Elijah to his hut and

nursed him back to life. If the strange señor chose to call upon the names of men and women whom he knew not, that was the señor's privilege, and it was his duty as a host to patter softly with bare feet on the dirt floor, and to bind the hot forehead with herbs which the desert gave. It was his duty as a host to bind with thongs the raving señor to his raw-hide couch, lest he should once more go out into the desert before his strength had returned.

As consciousness began to return to Elijah, his sense of injury took another form. He had been for several days in the Mexican's hut and no one had called for him or inquired. After all he had done for others, they had left him, turned from him in heartless ingratitude, in this his hour of need. He raged against Helen especially, but his rage changed first to an intense longing, then to a determination to see her again.

Toward the evening of the fifth day, he prevailed upon the Mexican to drive him to Ysleta. At the Rio Vista, having gone to his room, he called a servant and sent him with a message to Helen. She was not to be found. At the office he learned that Helen had gone out to the works and would be absent for several days. He would have followed, but he dared not. Her last words, the last look that he remembered so clearly, these told him only too plainly that she would not be forced, that

—he dared think no further. He must work on her sympathy through an appeal. He returned to his room at the hotel and found what he had overlooked before, a package of papers on his table. They had been sent over from the office. A slip of paper in Helen's writing, "Elijah Berl, Rio Vista." He tore the string from the bundle in feverish haste. His fingers trembled as he shuffled the letters one by one. Not one was in Helen's hand. Again and again he went over them, then he gave up in despair.

With infinite patience, the Almightly has taught us by precept and example, that our destinies are in our own hands; that the punishment for failure that comes to us, is self-inflicted, and not from him, when in blind despair, we thrust aside a redemption that is waiting to make us whole. The smitten rock that quenched the thirst of Israel, the parted sea that gave them a way to safety, the column of smoke that reached into the day, the pillar of fire that made the darkness light, these may be fables; but they speak with a voice that cannot be stilled, telling us that in ages past, as in the present, an eye that sleeps not, watches over us; that hope is for us if we will.

Among the discarded letters, was one from Winston. It told of the plucked fangs of Mellin, of Uncle Sid's restoration of the stolen money, of the

meeting with Seymour. It ended, "Come back, old man, we want you."

Late as was the hour when Elijah at last turned from his unopened letters, he rang for a servant and ordered a carriage to take him to his ranch. He could not go to the dam; the thought of idly waiting at the hotel was unendurable. He wanted to see some one, he must see some one. He had deliberately put Amy from him; but she did not know this. The black heartlessness of his proposed action did not once occur to him. Before leaving the hotel he wrote an appeal to Helen. He told her where he was going and that he would wait her answer.

At the ranch, he found Amy as of old. Eager, questioning hope leaped to her eyes as they rested on his face; then the hope died out to the dumb, patient waiting; the dumb, patient suffering of an animal that endures without question, without resentment. Through the long days that followed, she did her best to draw him from himself, from the fires that were consuming him. It was in vain. In vain, when she found him seated with his eyes fastened on the dusty trail from Ysleta, she slipped her hand in his and nestled close to him, inviting confidences that were never given, tendering sympathy that was not accepted, assuring him of unswerving confidence that nothing and no one could destroy.

He let no opportunity pass to send other appeals

to Helen, but these too were unanswered. One day a messenger came. Elijah did not wait, but rushed to meet him. The message was not from Helen. Instead, a telegram. Mechanically he signed the receipt which the messenger held out; then he opened the envelope. The message was in cipher, but he knew each symbol. The messenger looked at him inquiringly. Elijah shook his head, "No answer," and the messenger rode away.

It did not matter to Elijah that the message was over a week old; the message itself was sufficient. "Have failed to raise the money. I start for California to-morrow."

Elijah felt that his return to Ysleta was hopelessly barred. Mrs. MacGregor was there now, Seymour was there, Helen was there. Like sneaking jackals, they were ready to fall upon him, wounded to the death. They would not leave him in peace. They would not leave him in peace even with what was his own. Nothing was left him but vengeance; how could he compass it?

Like the white flash of a thunderbolt, the transaction with Mellin came to him. Its sinister condition—"within three months after the water shall have been turned into the main canal of the Las Cruces"—danced before his eyes. The words were clear and minatory, but there was a hidden meaning that he could not catch, that was pointing the way of deliverance. He strained forward as if to

listen more clearly. The swollen veins on his forehead throbbed and beat; then he sprang to his feet—

"As God lives, that water shall not be turned on!"

The sun had set and darkness was falling, but day and night were alike to Elijah now. He was at the gates of the canal at the mouth of the cañon. The roar of the Sangre de Cristo was gone, only a trickle of water slipped by blackened boulders and gurgled as it fell into tiny pools, then wimpled and slid out toward the desert. Up through the trail that led to the dam, darkened by dense evergreens to a deeper shadow, he rode wildly. In the shadow of a great rock, he looked down upon the still rising water, black with depth. He saw the great tubes let in at the base, the wheels by which the gates were controlled, the wide, rock-paved waste weir that, leading from the reservoir, gave into the cañon below. He noted the broken earth, the clinging trees that hung over the weir. His eyes, calculating, merciless, rested on the trees. A gleam of triumph came to them. If the wheels were broken, the gates could not be opened, and the water was even now trickling over the weir. In a day or two, the whole volume of the Sangre de Cristo would pour through it. Just a little powder behind the retaining wall, and the whole bank would fall and choke the weir. Just a few hours

and, the weir choked, the gates unopened, the whole volume of the river would creep over the coping of the dam, pick out grain by grain the unprotected earth, till the dam weakened, the mighty mass of stored water would rush in devastating waves down through the cañon, and the canal would be as if it had never been. The dream of a life, the labor of years, these lay in the hollow of his hand.

Why should he pity others who were pitiless to him? What mattered it, if, like Samson of old, he should drag down the very pillars of the structure he had raised? What mattered it, if he too should perish in the ruins?

CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX

The party that had gathered to see the last stone of the great Sangre de Cristo dam swung into position was far larger than Winston had expected. Elijah was not among them. Winston had spared no effort to find Elijah and to deliver to him another message to the effect that he was once more a free man. Messengers had been sent to his ranch; but he had left home and Amy had not seen him for several days; she supposed him to be in Ysleta. Parties had scoured the mountain in the vicinity of the dam, but in vain. It was clear that Elijah was purposely in hiding and that the exercises at the dam must be carried on without him.

Ysleta was largely represented. Winston was at first surprised, then deeply grateful for the genuine interest which even the wildest boomers displayed in his work. As, one by one, in pairs or in groups, they took him cordially by the hand, congratulated him on the successful completion of a great piece of work, compared the lasting utility of his work with their own ephemeral and selfish efforts, a wave of self-reproach swept over him. These were the people whom, in season and out, he had condemned

as greedy, selfish, unprincipled sharks. For the first time in his life, he began to realize the fact that, even in the worst of humanity, there is a soul of goodness, a soul that is only obscured, never extinguished. In deep contrition, he reviewed his attitude of mind toward Elijah. He saw him in a new light, the light of kindliness that was radiating from those whose hearts he had condemned as black with unscrupulous greed. He pictured Elijah, shunning his fellow men like a hunted animal, the warmth of his good intentions changed to the biting flame of bitter resentment against those who were to profit by his success, and who had turned from him at sight of the first shadow that had fallen upon him. He reproached himself for not having gone directly to Elijah on the first suspicion of defalcation, for not having pointed out to him his error, for not having pleaded with him to face the consequences of his wrong doing, to endeavor to set himself right. He contrasted his self-righteous conduct with that of Helen Lonsdale, her readiness to stand by Elijah, to assume her own share of blame for Elijah's mistaken actions. He had assumed that, because certain of Elijah's actions had been criminal, Elijah was a criminal by instinct, and he, a friend, an intimate business associate, had treated him as one, but made no effort at reclamation.

Winston's was not an emotional nature, but the

circumstances in which he was placed, played upon his calmly balanced mind, until he saw his own self-righteous errors and condemned himself as sharply as he had condemned Elijah. He was recalled to himself by the proffered hand of one of the most successful and as he deemed him, one of the most heartless of Ysleta's boomers.

"Say, Ralph, old man, I want to do myself the honor of shaking hands with the real thing. This work," he swept his hand with a comprehensive gesture which included the dam, the canal, and the waiting hillsides, "makes us feel like thirty cents Mexican. It don't come with the real plunk from us, you know, but it's real just the same. Ysleta wasn't worth whooping for, but we whooped. We whooped for cash. Some of us got it; but what we got, others lost, and we knew it. But you fellows have helped us to make good. With this thing in working order," he again pointed to the dam, "Ysleta will make good in time."

"I know it," Winston's voice was regretful, "but the beginning, end and middle of this whole business, is a hunted man who dares not show his face, even to those whom he had every reason to believe were his friends."

The man looked sharply at Winston.

"You mean 'Lige Berl?"

"Yes, the best man of us all."

"You're right there. And say, Ralph, you just

listen. We all know about this Pacific business. It was a mistake on 'Lige's part, that's all. He'll make good, if he gets a chance, and by God, we're going to stand by and see that he gets it."

Winston's grasp tightened on the hand he held.

"It's all straightened out now, if we only knew where he was."

The work at the dam called for Winston's attention. As he passed through a bowing, smiling group, he came face to face with Helen. She was laughing and chatting with some Ysleta acquaintances. She darted an eager, inquiring look at Winston as he came towards her. In obedience to an unvoiced bidding, she joined Winston as he passed by. Beyond the hearing of the group, her look changed to one of anxiety.

"Have you seen anything of Elijah?" she asked.

"Not a thing. Helen, I'm worried about Elijah. He has been home, but has gone again and I can't find him in the mountains. I have sent men everywhere."

There were tears in Helen's eyes. They did not fall; they only softened and intensified their depths.

"I hoped to see him here. If we could only get word to him about Seymour." After a moment's hesitation, she added: "I have had several strange letters from him, but no clue as to where they were sent from."

Winston's glance wandered to the group of Ysleta men.

"It just crushes me, Helen, to think that these men are actually truer to Elijah than I have been."

"No, don't blame yourself too much. I know more now than I did when you and Uncle Sid held me up that day in the office, and— Oh, I cannot talk about it, Ralph! It is all unspeakably awful."

Helen turned abruptly away and joined Uncle Sid at the foot of the great derrick which was to swing the last stone into place.

Winston glanced quickly at her, but she was talking eagerly with Uncle Sid, her somber mood apparently quite gone. He turned inquiringly to the foreman, who nodded his head in reply.

"Come, Helen; they are ready for us." He took Helen by the arm to steady her, and together they started out over the foot-way on the crest of the dam, Helen a little in advance of Winston.

"Don't look down," he continued, "it may make you dizzy."

"Dizzy!" she repeated derisively, "why I could walk a slack rope. It's great! I don't wonder that you are an engineer."

"This is easy, doing things, when some one tells you what to do and what for."

"Thanks! You are original and independent. So am I." With reckless daring she freed her arm from Winston's detaining hand, and before he

could prevent, she was skipping over the dizzy walk far ahead.

"Stop, Helen, stop! It's dangerous!" His voice was commanding.

"I know it is. That's where the fun comes in." Over her shoulder she flung him a mocking glance from reckless eyes.

Winston dared make no quick move that would increase her danger. He could not understand the spirit of bravado that had come over her. A sigh of intense relief escaped him as she grasped one of the staying ropes and swung inside the enclosure, which, hanging far out over the abyss, railed in the space where the last stone was to be laid.

"It's no credit to you," he said sternly, "that your childish prank hasn't ended in tragedy."

Helen was conscious of a creeping thrill as she looked into Winston's eyes. They were like poles of a dynamo, with thousands of volts of energy waiting to leap out, if the safety line was crossed. She felt as if she were dangerously near the line.

"Be thankful for your mercies," she said lightly. "No tragedy has happened."

Winston wanted to say more, but an expectant crowd was waiting.

"Well, go ahead," he said. "You're in command now."

"I don't know where to begin, but I'm not old enough yet not to take a dare."

Out on one of the abutments, a great derrick rose; near its foot an engineer stood with his hand on the throttle of an engine. Helen waved her hand, looking defiantly at Winston.

There came the short, sharp bark of the engine, the groaning of rope and timber as the locking stone swung in the air, turned, poised high above them; them slowly began to sink to its position. Under Winston's directions, her small, firm hands guided the great block, as it settled, then came to a rest. The fall ropes slackened, and Helen unclasped the tackle. Amidst the cheers of the watchers on the abutments, the boom of the derrick swung free. The last stone had been laid in the Sangre de Cristo dam.

Helen turned to Winston. Her great, black eyes were solemn.

"It is finished now, isn't it Ralph?"

"It is."

Helen sighed deeply. It suggested relief from a long, anxious strain.

"Thunder and Mars, Helen! Isn't there anything more in life for you? I can imagine Alexander heaving that sigh when he realized that he'd done the whole world."

"That's where Alexander and I separate. I'm relieved, not regretful."

Winston spoke with feeling.

"It must be a relief, Helen. No one has done more for this work than you."

Helen's reply was unguarded.

"I wasn't thinking of myself."

Winston looked up in unfeigned surprise.

"You weren't?"

"Let's not talk of this now. It's finished."

"Tell me what you meant."

Helen looked at Winston. There was a suggestion of yielding in her eyes. Her lips trembled on the verge of speech; then they set, voiceless. Why should she tell Winston of her fears of Elijah? That, driven to desperation, as she knew he was, she feared that in some way he would thwart the work that was now completed.

"Sometime, perhaps; not now." She was not quite herself. "This will stay here forever?" She evidently wished to be reassured.

"Unless something happens."

"But what can happen?" She questioned anxiously.

"A very simple thing might destroy the whole thing in an hour."

Helen's face grew white.

Winston noted the look, but failed to assign the correct reason for it. Helen had given more to the work than he had thought.

"There's no danger, really." Winston spoke with conviction. "It's just this. We've built a

rip-rap dam with a stone facing. No amount of water behind it can ever move it. Yet if by chance the water should flow over the crest, it would go in an hour.

"What's to prevent it?" Helen's voice was sharp.

"The waste weir." Winston pointed to the stone paved canal on the far side of the dam. "We know the rainfall here. That spillway will handle twice the amount."

"But if it should become choked?"

"We have the flood gates." Winston pointed to the two great shafts that reached up from the base of the dam, crowned with grooved wheels.

"But suppose they should get wedged so they could not be opened?"

"Then I would advise you to get out of the way! What's the matter, Helen?" Winston grew suddenly conscious that there was more in Helen's persistent questions that appeared on the surface.

Helen did not reply.

"Couldn't all this have been provided against?"

"Yes; but it would have cost more money than we had to put in. It's safe enough, if we watch out."

Helen laid her hand on Winston's arm. Her eyes were deep and anxious.

"Watch out day and night, Ralph. There is danger, grave danger."

Winston was thoroughly aroused.

"You know something that you are concealing from me. Tell me!"

"I have told you enough to put you on your guard. I can't tell you any more. I don't know any more."

Helen turned resolutely toward the footway. Winston walked silently beside her. He wanted to know more, but he felt the uselessness of words. As soon as he could free himself from the friends who thronged around him and Helen, he sought out Uncle Sid and told him of Helen's warning.

"What do you make out of it?" he asked.

"No more than you do, I guess."

"You think Elijah is at the bottom of it all, don't you?"

"Yes, I do. I'm sure of it."

"Why didn't she tell me then?" Winston burst out.

"Well, women are queer creatures." Uncle Sid spoke meditatively. "They see more sides to a man than we do, an' when he's down, they stay by him closer. I sometimes think that Helen knows more about 'Lige than we do; anyway, she's mighty suspicious of him, but she's goin' to give him every chance to get up, an' at the same time she's lookin' out that no one gets hurt when he's flappin' his heels around, tryin' to make his feet. What are you doin' to shut off any deviltry?"

"I've put on extra watchmen, day and night, and I've got men out hunting Elijah."

"I guess that's all that you can do."

Winston meditated long over Helen's warning and Uncle Sid's explanation of her conduct. The idea of Elijah's trying to injure the dam finally seemed too monstrous to be entertained. It occurred to him to remain at the dam and not trust to watchmen; but this was impossible. He had other pressing duties demanding him. Nothing could happen this night; the next would be spent at the mouth of the cañon. The day following he would send some of his young assistants in place of the Mexicans.

CHAPTER TWENTY-SEVEN

The sun had long since sunk beneath the sheen of the ocean and one by one the distant stars pricked sharp and clear through the azure veil that made the world a unit in the depths of space. From their spanless heights, moonlight and starlight plunged like hissing shafts of water and, like shafts of water falling on the softly resisting air, broke in diffused mantles that half concealed and half revealed the softened contours of the slumbering world. The gently falling radiance disclosed no detail of the swelling plains below, yet each tumid roll, crowned with its aureole of lustrous light voiced with tongueless words an everlasting peace.

Winston was busy until far into the night. There was a strange sense of oppression as he passed from point to point of the now completed dam. The machinery that had for so long a time been pulsing with life, was now stilled. There were no banked fires under the boilers, to speak of rest for the labor of the morrow, for the labor was completed. In the laborer's camp, the men were packing their few belongings for an early start in the morning. Some were busy touching up the machines for their

long rest. These were not to be dismantled at once, but were to wait a more convenient time. The lanterns of the men twinkled through clumps of mountain pine where the shadows lay thick and deep; then faded to a dim point in the white moonlight. The occasional clink of a hammer, and the voices of the men drifted across the water, softened by distance. It was funereal, after all! And he had looked forward to these very sounds with an impatient thrill. Now it was all completed. The last stone of the dam had been laid, from the dam to the terminal canal every gate had been put in, every trestle had been built, every tunnel had been driven. Tomorrow, with the men, he would go over every foot of the canal for a final inspection. If this was satisfactory, and he knew it would be, in two days the gates would be opened and the water turned into the canal.

Winston was standing on the apron of the dam looking out over the great reservoir that in the moonlight lay like a plate of burnished steel between the pine-clad granite hills that dipped steeply into the water. The dam was already filled to the brim, and the full volume of the Sangre de Cristo was sweeping through the weir and plunging into the cañon below. The sights and sounds only deepened Winston's oppression. His work was done; the work he loved so well. The future held nothing so bright as the past had held. Only, in the future,

was there to be the dull routine of office work, the laying off of orange groves, the running out of ditches that would lead the water to them; simple work this that any tyro who could set a level and read an angle, could perform. No intricate problems that absorbed every energy of an active mind, that blotted out consciousness of time and self in delicious oblivion of existence; no obstacles of nature that lifted a forbidding hand "thus far and no farther;" no thrill of determined battle that rushed against these obstacles and bore them down. His field had been sown; the harvest was waiting for him to thrust in and reap, what? Money; that was all. Money that would only intensify his consciousness of an existence that like rank vegetation throve aimlessly only to rot and thrive again. What would love, even Helen's love, mean to him? Would that, assured, satisfy him, or would it, possessed, be to him like his work that was done? What had drawn them together but an intense, absorbing, common interest?

This mood was strange to Winston. He could, and did, reason himself out of it; but its influence remained. In his cabin, which was his office as well, he wrapped his blankets around him and lay down to sleep.

Helen's night was sleepless. She had retired early, not to sleep, as she knew, but that in solitude she might try to think out more clearly her course

of action. Her admiration for Winston had increased a thousand-fold, if that were possible; and he had offered her his love to crown it all, and she had seemed to weigh it in her hands, as a Jew might bite a piece of gold to try its worth. She had done this when every fiber of her heart cried out against it, demanding that she should render to Ralph his own. Why had she turned even seemingly against Ralph, against herself?

Only that she might do penance for her sin. Was not that it after all? But she was innocent of any intentional wrong. Was it not selfishness, this penance which she was imposing upon herself? Was she not compelling Ralph to bear a part of her punishment, demanding that he wait in doubt till she could declare herself purified? Was it not pride and selfish pride which demanded that through Elijah's redemption she should be declared free?

Then a thought came to her which quickened every nerve to painful throbs. Was it not worse than selfishness, was it not a crime? Was not this shielding of Elijah a crime against others, innocent? What if she should fail? Her heart was beating with great, painful throbs. She thought of what Ralph had told her as he had showed her the weak points of the dam. "If the waste weir should be choked, in a few hours the dam would be gone." He had pointed out to her just how simple

a thing it was to wedge the gates and to choke the weir. And she had listened, and to protect herself,—that was the pitiful part of it,—to protect herself, she had warned him to be on his guard. She began dressing herself with trembling fingers. She would go to him and tell him all. Let him think what he might, she would tell him all, unsparing of herself. She parted the flaps of the tent and stepped out into the night. Outside, she paused for a moment. The soft gray of the moonlight, lying white on the silent tents, the sighing of the pines, the distant, bell-like notes of calling wood-birds, spoke to her of peace that stilled her acute fears. Then she became conscious of another sound; a throbbing, muffled roar that made the night air tremulous.

She changed the direction of her steps. On the bridge that spanned the waste weir, she looked down on the swirling waters that rushed over the floor of the weir. For a moment she paused, then went out over the foot-board of the dam. The gate house rose black from the waters that lapped against the dam. Inside the gate house, every wheel and gear was in place. Once more in the open air, her tense feelings relaxed. She laughed at her fears. Her resolution hardened. In the morning she would tell Ralph everything. The relaxation from the strain of the night induced a sleep that kept her late in bed. When she joined the others, Ralph

had gone. The party were to camp that night at the mouth of the cañon, where he would meet them the following day for lunch. Helen was disappointed. At first she thought of riding ahead and hunting out Ralph, but she knew him, and the idea of overtaking him was absurd. She restrained herself with as much patience as she could command, but her senses were on the alert.

The ponies were saddled and bridled, waiting for them when breakfast was over. Helen was surprised at this. She well knew the spirit of mañana, which, with the lesser virtues had come down to the descendants of the Spanish cavaliers. She was therefore surprised at the alert, beady eyes of the swarthy Mexicans, in place of the dreamy lassitude to which she was accustomed. The surprise was ephemeral and soon passed away; but she was to recall it later.

The following morning when the party was again under way, Helen rode up to Uncle Sid.

"Uncle Sid, you ride down to the camp with the crowd, and I'll meet you there at noon. I'm going this way." She pointed to a trail which branched off from the main line.

"What for?" Uncle Sid asked bluntly.

Helen could hardly answer satisfactorily to herself much less to Uncle Sid.

"Oh, she replied, "because I want to. Won't that do?"

"You'd better come along with us," Uncle Sid protested. "You might meet some more dried beef."

"I'm not afraid; besides I'm mounted now." Then they parted.

The trail which Helen had chosen, followed the canal. For a distance it was squeezed tight between the walls of the steep-sloped, cedar-tufted barranca. The bed was dry now; but when the water should be turned on, this trail would be impassable. A little further, and the gorge opened into a deep arroyo which the canal bridged, then turned and followed the opposite bank.

Helen had followed this trail for two reasons. In the first place, she wanted to be alone. Then, this was the trail over which she had ridden with Ralph when he had first shown her his work. The head of the arroyo was clad with a thicket of cedars, so dense as to be almost impenetrable. As the last foot-fall sounded on the bridge, Helen's pony halted abruptly, and with swelling nostrils and forward pointing ears, whinnied a short, sharp challenge. There was an answering whinny, and Helen's eyes followed the direction of the sound. Almost hidden by the dull leaves of the cedars, was a draggled looking pony, saddled, with the reins trailing on the ground. At first, Helen hardly noticed the figure squatting limply beside the pony. His dishevelled clothing was stuck full of gray needles,

like those scattered on the ground, whence the figure had evidently just risen to a sitting posture. The man raised his eyes and Helen's heart stood still. In the gray, drawn face, the dull, lusterless eyes, she recognized Elijah Berl. As she looked wonderingly at him, in spite of the knowledge of his misdeeds, a great wave of womanly pity swept over her heart. A single glance at the pitiful figure, with the knowledge that had come to her from her associations with him, told her the struggle he had lived through, a struggle that had unbalanced his reason and left him lower than the beasts of the field.

"Oh, Elijah! Why weren't you at the dam?" Her voice was tremulous, in spite of her efforts to control it.

The answer to her words was a vacant, uncomprehending stare.

"Every one missed you," she continued. "Every one was asking for you." Again she paused, eagerly searching her soul for words that would bring the light of reason to the listless eyes.

There was no response, save a dropping of the dull eyes, an aimless picking of the fingers at the needles that clung to his garments.

Helen reined her pony close to the abutment of the bridge, and dismounting, trailed the bridle on the stones. She trembled at what she was about to do, but the spirit of atonement forced her on. An-

other moment, and she was beside the limp figure, one hand resting on the bowed shoulders.

"Elijah, listen! I have something to tell you. Listen, for you must not miss a single word. Go back to Ysleta, go back to Amy. You are free. Mr. Seymour—"

At the name, Elijah sprang to his feet, his hands clenched and knotted, his eyes shining with maniacal rage.

"Curse him!" he shouted, "Curse him, curse him! Curse them all for a pack of ravening wolves! He has done it; they have done it! The Philistines be upon them! They be of them who would gather where I have strewn, who would reap of the harvest I have sown. The day of wrath is upon them, the consuming anger of a terrible God. Listen!" He seized Helen's hand, crushing it in his fierce grasp, as he bent forward toward the cañon of the Sangre de Cristo. His eyes were strained, his lips parted.

Helen was half conscious of a sudden silence. The roaring waters were stilled. She was beginning to comprehend the reason and the import of the hushed waters. Elijah dropped the clasped hand; he stood triumphant, his head thrown back, his eyes raised to the cloudless sky.

"It is done! 'I will tell you what I have done for my vineyard; I will take away the hedge thereof, and it shall be eaten up; and I will break down the wall thereof, and it shall be trodden down.

And I will lay it waste; it shall not be pruned nor digged, but there shall come up briars and thorns. Hell hath enlarged herself and opened her mouth without measure; and their glory and their multitude, and their pomp, and he that rejoiceth, shall descend into it!' "

The words were chanted, rather than spoken; chanted with the resonant triumph of him who has fought and won. He yet stood, with clenched, outspread hands; but the color was dying from the drawn cheeks, the fierce light fading from the gleaming eyes. Then he stood as before, dull, listless, apathetic. The momentary fire had burned itself to ashes.

Helen stood with every sense strained to catch the full import of Elijah's changing moods. What was he about to do? What had he done? She must prevent his purpose if possible, nullify it if— this was not to be thought of now. She must read, and read quickly, the flickering light of reason that burned fitfully through the chaos of his soul. She was certain that reason had departed; was it beyond recall? She must try. Precious as she felt the moments to be, she must yet try. She took one of Elijah's hands in her own firm grasp.

"You don't understand, Elijah. He is not your enemy." She dared not use Seymour's name again. "He is your friend. He and Ralph have sent out men to find you; they are searching for

you now. They are looking for you to tell you that the money has been restored. They say that—" Helen hesitated, but the pause was imperceptible, "you did the best thing, the best thing for the company, in buying the Pico ranch; that you saw farther than they did."

Helen was hesitating mentally, but her words went on without pause. She was watching intently for a sign of comprehension in the stolid, passionless face. With her last words, the light came again to the eyes she was searching. Not the fierce passion-blaze of unchained fury, only the peaceful glow of returning reason. He spoke slowly, stumblingly, as one waking from a dream.

"They know now,—that I was right, that—I did right?" The eyes again wavered between intelligence and stupor.

"Yes, Elijah, they know now."

His voice was querulous.

"Why didn't they trust me? After all I had done; why didn't they trust me?"

"They do trust you now. Come back, Elijah. All is forgiven."

Elijah's reply was again querulous, almost peevish.

"Why didn't they trust me? Why didn't they trust me before it was too late?" The bitterness dropped from voice and manner. His voice was loud and terrible. "Don't you hear me? It is too

late! Listen! It is too late! Don't you know what this means? Listen! The roar of the water has stopped! Don't you know what this means? The flood gates are closed. In a few minutes, in a few hours, the reservoir will fill, and the water will go over the dam. Don't you know what that means? It is too late!" He paused! there was a strained look in his eyes. Then he sprang into action.

"Is it too late? My God! Is it too late?"

He was in the saddle, the pony's head pointing up the cañon, his flanks shrinking from the pounding stirrups, and from the lashings of the bridle thongs.

Helen watched the flying horseman. For a moment she was struck motionless with uncomprehending terror. What did it all mean? What could she do? Oh, if Ralph were only here! For a moment she stood; then she was on her pony and riding hard toward the camping place and Ralph. Through scrubby sage and cedar, stumbling in burrows, shying at stinging cactus, her horse was driving madly on. Her thoughts were all on finding Ralph; but mingling with these, were the beady eyes of the alert Mexicans, and the silenced waters of the Sangre de Cristo. These had a meaning for her now.

From the summit of a low ridge, she saw below her the camp of the party for which she was so eagerly watching. One tall figure she singled out

and kept her eyes upon him. He turned. She could almost see his questioning eyes as he strode out from his companins. He was near enough to hear her cry—

"Oh, Ralph! The dam! The dam! Elijah is at the dam!"

CHAPTER TWENTY-EIGHT

Winston asked no questions. Whatever else there might be to learn, could be learned at the dam with no waste of precious time. As to what time meant, Winston was fully alive. As to what effect the constant, lonely ferment over real or fancied wrongs would have upon a morbidly sensitive mind, he took no moment to forecast. He knew the ruin that could be wrought; for he knew the strength and the weakness of the dam; and he knew Elijah. The thought that Elijah could be driven to wreck the crowning work of years of struggle, seemed to him monstrous, but he knew that it was possible; and he knew Elijah. He knew also, the sinister conditions in the note to Mellin. He knew that they were harmless now; but Elijah did not know.

Winston could count upon his men and they followed his lead. He was eager, anxious; but neither eagerness nor anxiety prevented the calm judgment which spared his horse while pushing it to the limit; and his men followed his lead.

As he flew past the intake gates of the canal he noted that they were closed. This fact pointed to the worst. As he rode through the cañon he noted the silence, the oily threads of water sliding be-

tween the boulders; these facts made suspicion certainty. The worst had happened or was on the way.

As he came near the dam, he did not need the sight of the thin, wrinkling veil that was sliding over the crest, and, in ever increasing volume, was plunging into the depths below, to tell him what had happened. As he sprang from his horse, he did not need to see the tangled mass of earth and timber that choked the waste weir to the brim, nor did he need to see the closed gates and the broken wheels that forbade the hope of opening them. Long ago, so it seemed, he had forecast the design and the method of its execution.

He saw another sight which he had not forecast. He saw repentance—repentance, he saw surely; atonement, if within the reach of time, and life, and sacrifice of life. He saw Repentance with bared brow, with gray, drawn face, with glowing eyes that directed crashing strokes of a shining axe, eating deep into a locking tree-trunk which held back with its mass of crushed timbers and close-packed earth, the seething waters of the weir. He saw it all, and his heart swelled and pulsed and throbbed with the glory of it. He saw and felt the glory of it, that lifts man above the beasts that raven, the angels who adore, and places him at the side of God, the crowning labor of his mighty hands.

But through the swelling, flaming glory that bathed the world with the light of heaven, the earthborn instinct thrust; to save a human life though repentance and atonement were laid low, and the light that they radiated was quenched. Through the oily, sliding, deepening veil Ralph dashed, shouting as he went—

"Come back! Come back! Elijah! Come back"!

But Repentance heeded not the call. Once again the shining blade bit deep in the straining timber, and Atonement had gained its perfect work.

A crash like riving thunder drowned the swirl of falling water, and the huddled mass of rock and earth and timber groaned and swelled and thrust, and then, with a crash and roar, swept through the stone-paved weir and plunged into the yawning cañon.

The blade had fallen from the bared hands; the gray, drawn face was lifted to the heavens; but the grayness was gone. In its place was the light that comes from but one source. Repentance was crowned with atonement; but life had departed.

Not quite. From a boiling eddy, struggling, impatient to join the swirling rush of turbid waters, pitying hands drew a torn, bruised body. A rough, kind hand brushed earth-stained locks from the still face.

"My God! That sight would make a man of the

devil!" This was the tribute of a dormant soul cased in a toil-calloused body.

Ralph was bending low. The eyelids fluttered, then sprang open; but the vision was not of this world. The lips trembled—

"Amy! Amy!" Then they closed forever.

CHAPTER TWENTY-NINE

Had a ball of fire, shot from the cloudless sky, smitten one of their number to eternal silence, no greater, no more awesome hush could have fallen upon the merry party below the slam. Men looked at each other with stricken eyes, then turned to watch the speeding horsemen led by Winston. As Helen rode nearer to them, questioning eyes were turned to her, but she gave no heed. Only in the white, set face they read the outlines of some awful tragedy. Uncle Sid was first at her side.

"Come with me," she commanded. Then she turned and rode slowly toward the cañon. Uncle Sid rode close beside her.

"What is it, little girl?" There was a pitying, restful caress in the softened voice.

Helen longed to throw herself in his arms, to bury her head on his breast, to pour out her soul in confession before him. She controlled herself, her voice.

"I have found Elijah." Then she told him all. It was good to unburden herself. She told of the pitiful wreck from which reason had all but fled; the burst of insane rage when Seymour's name was

mentioned; the dumb struggle to grasp the assurance that he was forgiven, was free; the hopeless plaint, "Why didn't they trust me before it was too late,—" the silence of the river; the wild cry,—"Is it too late, my God, is it too late?" the mad ride, fury driven, up the cañon trail. She told him of her fears for the dam, how easily it could be wrecked, and her voice, steady until now, broke pitifully. "I should have told Ralph all. Only my wicked pride kept me from it."

Uncle Sid reined his pony closer and laid a soothing hand on her arm.

"It isn't too late, little girl. Listen! You have saved Elijah. You have saved the dam!"

They were near the cañon now, and a heavy murmur, growing in intensity, pulsed in the quiet air. A great, hopeful light glowed in Helen's eyes; then it suddenly gave place to anxious fear. Was it too late after all? Had the dam given way? A moment and her questions would be answered. She sat with parted lips, and straining eyes, waiting for the rending, crashing thunder that would come if—then a sigh of relief escaped her. At the cañon's mouth, the turbid, soil-stained waters of the Sangre de Cristo were leaping and falling, but the volume was decreasing. She turned to Uncle Sid.

"Wait here. I am going up the cañon."

She felt that she was losing control of herself;

she was striving against it, but in vain. Try as she would, she could lay hold of nothing in the past that could aid her. What had been her past? A sense of right and a determination to live in accord with it, and with what results? In self-confident pride she had looked down with contempt upon Ysleta boomers and their methods. At the first beck of Elijah, yielding to the subtle, intangible influence which he had thrown around her, she had abandoned her principles and had become as one of them. Not openly, not strongly, not defiantly, here was the shame and the pain of it; she had not been herself, but another. She had protested, to herself, to Elijah, she had stood up against him and had gone down before him. Day after day, the meshes of this sinister influence had held her more closely in its silken web; day after day, her past stood out more clearly with all its pitiful failures, and day after day the future, even with the light of the past beating white upon it, saw her yet more strongly bound. What deeper depths would have yawned to engulf her, had not Elijah's declaration jarred her to a loathsome recognition of what she was, of what she might become, she shuddered to forecast. A smile of bitter self-contempt played over her lips for a moment; then was gone.

In her darkness, there was yet a ray of light. She had failed, failed miserably. She bore this in

upon her soul with no softening words. This was her darkness.

Brave, strong, patient hands had laid hold upon Elijah. If they had not saved him, they had saved his work. They had laid hold upon her. If they had not saved her, they had made her failures harmless. This was her light. She could forget herself, her pain, her shame, in the glory of Ralph's triumph. From the dust of her humiliation, she could yet raise a heart filled with unselfish love.

Yet was there not hope? Ralph had known all that had lain on the surface and he had offered her his love and had asked for hers in return. She would be brave. She would tell him all. Even though he cast her aside, she would yet have her love for him which could not harm him, but save her. She would tell him all. Then if the light of love still shone in his eyes, the light of the love he offered, the light of the love he asked, she would know it; she could trust it without fear. She was learning a lesson that might not avail her; but she was learning a lesson. On the somber background of repentance the brightest pictures of life are painted.

Through the pine boughs that hung low over the trail, she caught a glimpse of hatless men who were carrying a burden between them. For a moment her heart stood still. It was death. Then her heart once more beat high. She saw Ralph's face,

a face clouded with grief but yet lightened by a supernal glow. She slipped from her pony and with bowed head waited for the covered burden to pass by. Then her eyes were raised to Ralph's; her hand was in his.

"It is all over, Helen; but his death was glorious. It was worth a thousand lives."

Her hand in Ralph's, she heard the story of Elijah's life redeemed in death. Tears welled from her eyes and fell silently down her cheeks.

Ralph was drawing her nearer; his arm was around her.

"I know all now, Helen." He would have said more but she checked him gently.

"No; you do not know all. I must tell you. I must." She was trying to free herself.

"I want you to tell me just one thing."

"I must. Then—" her eyes met his bravely.

He laid his fingers gently on her lips.

"I know what you would tell me, but I do not care to hear. I will not listen, Helen. Don't you believe that I know myself, that I know you?"

She hid her face in her hands.

"Ralph."

"Stop!" Ralph's voice was strong and commanding. "Every word you speak condemns me."

Slowly the hands dropped from the face that was now raised to his. The great, dark eyes were

deep with questioning hope. The lips trembled with a smile that a breath would fan into life.

"I must obey my master."

Ralph's face was close to hers. His voice was low and strong.

"Then tell me that you love me."

"I love you. With all my heart and soul and strength, I love you."

Gently she put him aside.

"Let me go now, Ralph. I must be with Amy."

CHAPTER THIRTY

A woman was standing beside an iron gate all but hidden in a riotous growth of blossoming vines that opened upon a grass-grown mound.

"To the memory of Elijah Berl."

"He shall make the desert blossom as the rose"—was graven on the bronze plate.

Far below her, and on either side, instead of the bare, brown hillsides of a few, short years ago, grew rank on rank, leaves of glossy green, flecked with tawny gold. Here and there, red-tiled houses, their walls all but covered with climbing roses, stood at the head of marshalled groves. Shining lines moved out and in, where the waters of the Sangre de Cristo sank into the red earth and sprang upwards in fruit and flower. The air was resonant with happy bird notes that trilled from tree to tree as the tiny musicians with swelling throats poured out the happiness that their little bodies could not contain.

There was no longer the old-time harshness of the desert air, the sky was bluer, the sunlight softer. There was nothing that whispered of death, save the bronze tablet; even this spoke not so much of death as of triumph over it.

By the side of the grave stood a woman clad in somber black. Her robes were out of harmony with the inscription, the blossoming landscape; out of harmony with the soft, patient eyes, the rounded, tinted cheeks, the fluffy masses of tawny hair. Not a line, not a wrinkle, not a gray thread told that the heart of Amy Berl was lying with her husband beneath the guarding bronze.

A tall, earnest faced boy was coming down the path, trying to preserve a dignified walk that was yet pulled into abrupt steps by a dancing, laughing girl who tugged at his outstretched arm.

"Mama," she cried, "Uncle Sid is waiting for you."

Amy slowly turned her eyes to the child, as if with an effort, then moved up the path. The boy was by his mother's side, walking evenly with her. The girl was dancing and skipping, now before them, now behind, dragging her mother to admire a new-blown rose, then starting off in vain chase of a rainbow-tinted lizard that skittered up a tree trunk, and, having reached a safe height, turned calmly and curiously towards its pursuer, and with palpitating throat and lazily blinking eyes, composed itself to rest.

Where the path opened out to the palm-bordered driveway, the child abandoned her companions and, with a merry shout, clambered into the carriage with Uncle Sid. Before he was aware of her pur-

pose, she had clutched the lines from his fingers and had snapped the drowsy horses into action. Uncle Sid regained his balance with difficulty.

"You pesky little jack-rabbit, you!" he growled. "Anybody'd know who your father was, with his eyes shut!"

Uncle Sid brought the horses to a halt and turned to Amy.

"You don't know of no orphan asylum nor no reform school, do you, where a respectable, steady-minded old sea captain could end his days in peace? Because if you do, I'm goin' to apply at once, if it takes me out of California. I'm gettin' used up. If Ralph jr. ain't got the colic an's a howlin' over it, he's cheerful, which is worse, an' when he does get to sleep, then Ralph an' Helen tackles the job right where he left off."

"You know you're always welcome here, Uncle Sid." Amy smiled at the old face that seemed to get no older in spite of his complaints.

"Yes," growled Uncle Sid, "to get yanked around by this bundle of electricity. The only thing that's restsome here, is that boy. Ain't you got no dance in your shanks?" Uncle Sid flicked his whip threateningly at the boy, who skipped aside smiling. "That's right. You keep it up till you've skipped the whole kit an' kerboodle into this wagon, an' I'll take the lot o' you to Palm Wells. That's what I'm here for."

They drove over a winding, palm-bordered road, through spicy orange groves, through ragged-barked, spindling groups of eucalyptus, and drew up before the doors of the Palm Wells cottage.

Ralph and Helen came out to meet their guests. Perhaps Ralph would have chosen to be more dignified in the welcoming of his friends, but a wriggling, crowing mass of pink and white prevented him.

"There he is!" groaned Uncle Sid. "There he is! The most wonderful thing in the whole world, exceptin' sixty hundred millions more just like him. He can't talk Latin nor Greek, nor anythin' but "googoo," when he's happy, an' "yow" when his feelin's are troublin' him, an' he don't know any better'n to play horse with his daddy's transit when he finds it lyin' round loose, just like any other good-for-nuthin' baby."

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